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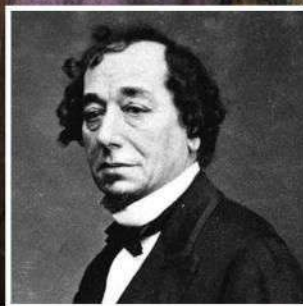
✿ The legacy of empire

✿ **The fight for the vote**

✿ The Victorian Christmas

✿ **Victorians at play**

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“From life in **London's East End slums** to the politics of the queen's drawing room, the Victorian age is a rich source of human interest. *The Story of the Victorians* looks at Britain during the long reign of **a formidable queen** (1837-1901), a period that saw dramatic events both at home and abroad.

The country's fast-growing industrial economy was spurred on by the meteoric growth of **the British empire**. We look at how this was created and maintained not just through commerce, but also through a constant series of wars, as well as how it shaped British society.

We'll discover some of the impressive cast of characters whose endeavours still influence British life today, from **Florence Nightingale** to industrialist **William Hesketh Lever** and naturalist Charles Darwin.

We'll also take a look at the **lives of ordinary people**, from cradle to grave, and at work and at play. This period saw the fight for political representation and the struggle for decent **living and working conditions**. We'll look at how rapid urbanisation brought great opportunities as well as challenges, creating a host of new identities, **from railway engineer to suffragist**. We'll also discover how the railway age ushered in social changes, from the rise of consumerism to the development of **seaside holidays**.

*The Story of the Victorians* brings together articles that have appeared previously in *BBC History Magazine* along with new content written specially for this edition. I hope you enjoy it.

**Rob Attar**

Editor

BSME Editor of the Year 2015, Special Interest Brand



“Something of that **great spirit of civic patriotism** that built our urban civilisation looks set for a renaissance”

The Labour MP and historian **TRISTRAM HUNT** muses on the current appeal of Victorian values, on page 114

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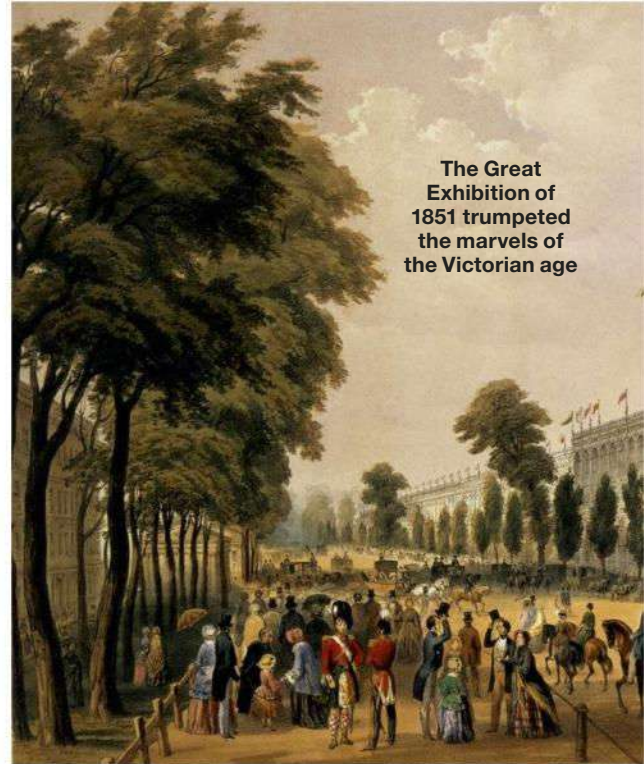
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Contemporary politics is enjoying a bit of a flirtation with Victorian values, says MP Tristram Hunt



# The Victorian era

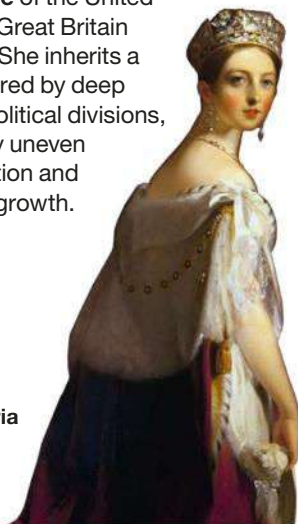
**Simon Morgan** explores some of the key themes and events affecting life in Queen Victoria's Britain



The Great Exhibition of 1851 trumpeted the marvels of the Victorian age

## 1837

The death of William IV brings 18-year-old Princess Victoria to the throne of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. She inherits a country scarred by deep social and political divisions, worsened by uneven industrialisation and rapid urban growth.



Young Victoria in her coronation regalia

## 1842

As distress and Chartist agitation continues, **Edwin Chadwick publishes his great Sanitary Report**. It reveals the shocking cost of Britain's rapid and unplanned urbanisation, in the form of lives cut short by disease. Chadwick's solution is a system of sewerage flushed by clean water, but the authorities are slow to act and it takes many decades to clean up the towns.

## 1846

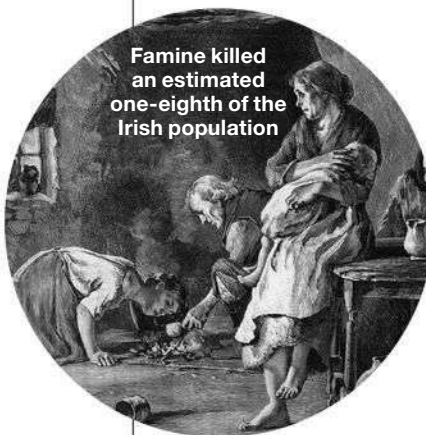
After a long agitation by the Anti-Corn Law League, **the Corn Laws** (import duties on grain and other foodstuffs) are **repealed by Conservative premier, Sir Robert Peel**. This victory for free trade splits the party, putting the Conservatives in a minority for the next 20 years.

1840

1850

## 1839

On 14 June, against a background of intense economic distress, **the first great Chartist petition is presented to parliament**. It contains almost 1.3 million signatures and demands the six points of the 'People's Charter' be made law. Its rejection prompts the desperate Newport Rising in November, involving thousands of Chartists armed with pikes and muskets. At least 22 are killed and 50 seriously wounded by soldiers stationed in the town.



Famine killed an estimated one-eighth of the Irish population

## 1845

In September, the first signs appear of **blight in the Irish potato crop**, upon which many of Ireland's population depend. The result is a famine that will last until 1850, killing a million people and forcing a million more to emigrate, many to Britain or the United States.

## 1848

Revolutions sweep across Europe. As Chartism revives, there is concern that Britain will be next. The government fears the pretext will be the presentation of the third and, in the event, final great Chartist petition. Despite extensive military preparations, **the feared insurrection never materialises** and all passes peacefully.



A Punch cartoon of the presentation of the Chartists' petition to Parliament

BRIDGEMAN/REX FEATURES/ALAMY





## 1851

The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations is held in Joseph Paxton's Crystal Palace, Hyde Park. The exhibition suggests **a country increasingly at ease with its identity** as a manufacturing nation and keen to move on from the social and economic conflicts of the 'hungry forties'.



Major William Hodson who received the surrender of the Mughal emperor in 1857

## 1857

The outbreak of the Indian Rebellion, with its stories of the massacre and (later disproved) mass rape of British women and children, sends the nation into shock. Atrocity is met with atrocity as the rebellion is savagely repressed. **Westminster takes direct charge of Indian affairs, and the East India Company is abolished.**



A Punch cartoon of Samuel Smiles, the era's self-help guru

## 1859

This year sees the publication of **three hugely influential Victorian texts**. John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty* will become one of the touchstones of western liberalism; Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* provides convincing proof and explanation of evolution; and Samuel Smiles's *Self-Help* becomes the bible of Victorian individualism.

## 1860

## 1855

The abolition of the newspaper stamp, effectively a tax on newspapers, ushers in a new era for the press. **It becomes possible to produce penny daily newspapers**, expanding the potential market for news and leading to a proliferation of titles, including *The Daily Telegraph*.



An explosion of cheap publications followed the abolition of a newspaper tax

## 1858

The election of the prominent Jew Lionel de Rothschild for the City of London in 1847, after much controversy, eventually prompts the alteration of the Christian oath sworn by MPs, thus **allowing Jews to serve as Members of Parliament**. This effectively removes the last civil disability suffered by British Jews.

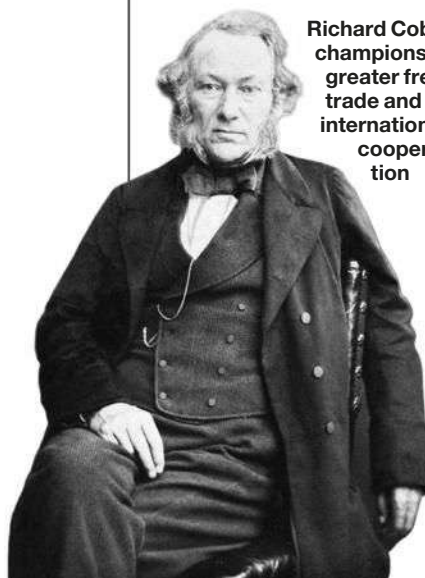
**Rothschild took his seat in Parliament 11 years after he was first elected**



## 1860

Richard Cobden, former leader of the Anti-Corn Law League, negotiates a **commercial treaty with France**. Over the next decade it becomes the foundation stone of a network of such treaties, which some historians have seen as a forerunner of the European Union. Later, as the network unravels, Britain looks increasingly isolated as a lone exponent of free trade.

**Richard Cobden champions greater free trade and international cooperation**



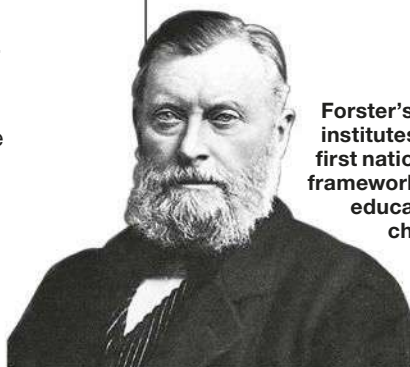




Aston Villa, 1879–80. The Football Association ratified the original rules of the game in 1863

## 1863

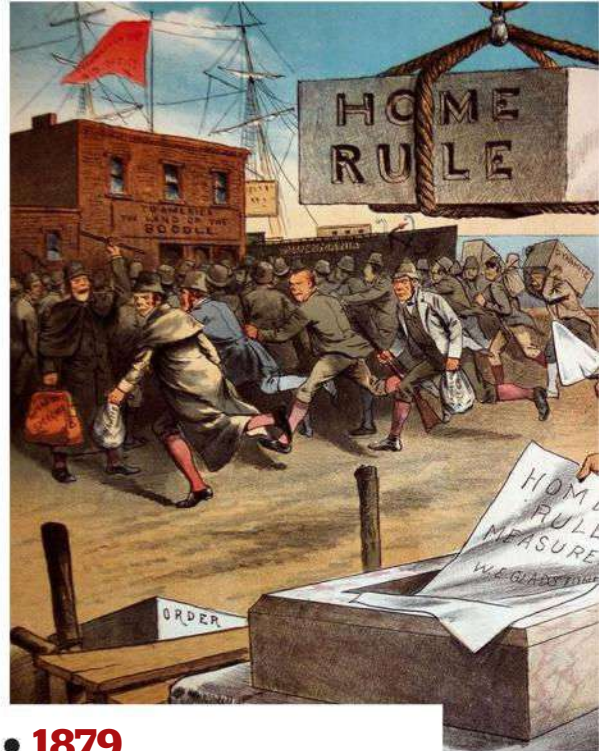
The newly formed **Football Association publishes a codified set of rules** for the game which becomes known as Association Football. Some historians have seen this rulebook as one of the most influential publications in history, paving the way for football to become a global mass-participation spectator sport and multi-billion-pound industry.



Forster's act institutes the first national framework for educating children

## 1870

Bradford MP William Forster's Elementary Education Act establishes a **national system of education**, overcoming opposition from non-conformists concerned that such a system would be dominated by the Church of England. It reflects the perceived need to educate the new electorate of working men.



## 1879

William Gladstone launches his election campaign for the Scottish Midlothian constituency with an **extensive speaking tour**, the first by an establishment politician seeking election. It represents a new form of politics, as mainstream politicians seek ways of **appealing to the new mass electorate**.

1870

1880

## 1867

The Second Reform Act is passed by a Conservative government led by Benjamin Disraeli. The act is intended to **give the vote in parliamentary boroughs to 'respectable' working-class men**, while excluding the unrespectable 'residuum' of paupers and casual workers. Agricultural workers have to wait until Gladstone's reform of 1884.

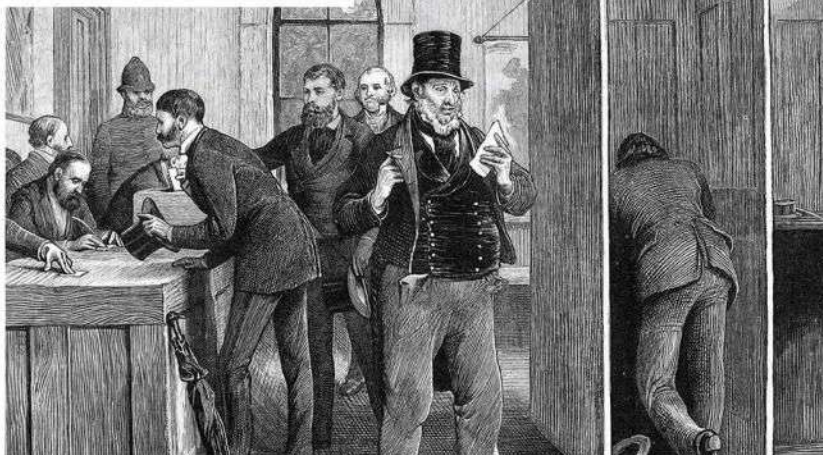
*Punch* depicts Disraeli as Fagin, appropriating Lord Russell's plans to extend the franchise



## 1872

The **secret ballot**, one of the Chartists' 'six points', is finally **introduced for parliamentary elections**. Hitherto, voting has been done in public, leaving voters open to bribery and intimidation.

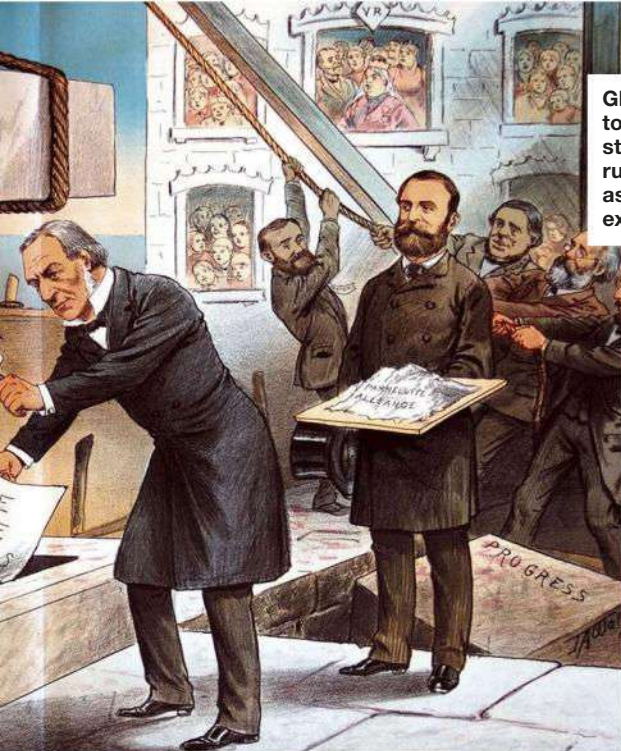
**New secret ballots curb the use of bribes and intimidation by landowners and employers**



## 1885

The Criminal Law Amendment act **raises the female age of consent to 16**, following a campaign by journalist WT Stead exposing child prostitution. However, this landmark in the protection of women also criminalises **'gross indecency'** between adult males. Ten years later, Oscar Wilde will become its most famous victim.





Gladstone's attempt to lay the cornerstone of Irish home rule is lampooned as inciting an exodus to America

## 1886

After years of agitation by the Home Rule party led by Charles Stewart Parnell, **Gladstone introduces an Irish Home Rule Bill** to the House of Commons. This time it is the Liberal Party's turn to split, as Gladstone's defeat leads to the formation of the Liberal Unionist Party that will eventually coalesce with the Conservatives.



Victoria's funeral. Her long reign comes to an end at her death on 22 January 1901

## 1893

Frustration with the elitism of the Liberal Party and its bias towards middle-class employers culminates in the **formation of the Independent Labour Party**, following a strike at Manningham Mills in Bradford in 1890–91. The ILP helps set up the Labour Representation Committee in 1900. This successfully promotes the election of several Labour MPs in 1906, leading to the formation of the Parliamentary Labour Party.

## 1901

In January, **Queen Victoria's long reign comes to an end** and thousands line the streets to watch her funeral cortege. The second half of her reign will be seen in retrospect as a period of great stability, as growing tensions over Ireland, labour relations, and the rights of women come to the fore in the years before the First World War. **III**

1890

1900



Two East End 'matchgirls' shortly before their strike against dismal working conditions

## 1888

The success of the **Bryant & May matchgirls' strike** is evidence of the labour movement's growing success in mobilising unskilled and female workers, previously ignored by the union movement. The so-called 'new unionism' has been seen as an important factor in raising working-class living standards.

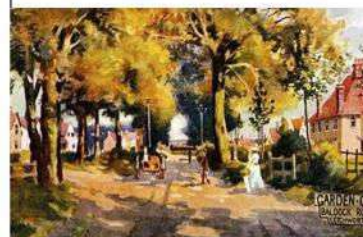
## 1897

The **National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies is formed** by Millicent Fawcett to coordinate the campaign for women's suffrage. Using constitutional pressure, these 'suffragists' lay the groundwork for women's enfranchisement in 1918. However, frustration with the speed of progress will later prompt the emergence of the militant 'suffragettes' in 1903.

With 58 per cent of adult males now able to vote, Millicent Fawcett leads the NUWSS's push for women's suffrage

## 1898

Ebenezer Howard publishes a book entitled *Tomorrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform* which argues that Britain's social problems could be solved by creating **new, socially mixed settlements called 'garden cities'**. Howard goes on to found the Garden City Association which builds Letchworth (pictured below) and Welwyn Garden City. His ideas will exert a powerful influence on town planning into the 21st century.



Dr Simon Morgan is head of history at Leeds Beckett University



# QUEEN COUNT





# AND RY

- ◆ **Victoria: Warrior Queen**  
The wars that maintained the empire
- ◆ **The British empire**  
Exploring its themes and legacies
- ◆ **Darwin versus God**  
Did his views conflict with religion?
- ◆ **The Victorian war on terror**  
The Fenian bombing campaign
- ◆ **Victoria & Albert**  
Discover the places that they loved





Victoria: not just Queen, but also Empress of India, a title reflecting the British empire's growth during her reign





# VICTORIA WARRIOR QUEEN

During Queen Victoria's reign, the British empire became the largest the world had ever seen. But, **Saul David** explains, this was achieved not just through commerce and control, but also a series of wars

**K**ensington Palace, London, six in the morning. Princess Victoria is woken by her mother and told that two men are there to see her. She rises quickly, throws a dressing-gown over her nightdress and, with her hair still loose about her shoulders, receives the two visitors in her sitting-room. She recognises them as Lord Conyngham, the portly lord chamberlain, and Dr William Howley, the septuagenarian archbishop of Canterbury. They have come from Windsor Castle and their presence can only mean one thing: her uncle, King William IV, is dead. The king "had expired at 12 minutes past two this morning", she records later in her journal, "and consequently I am Queen".

Victoria was just 18 when she became Queen on 20 June 1837. At the time, Britain was the world's leading industrial power, with apparently limitless supplies of coal and iron and a virtual monopoly of steam power. London was not only the largest city in the world, but its principal financial exchange. Victoria's navy was recognised as the ultimate arbiter of world affairs, while her army basked in the reputation it had won at Waterloo. Yet the British empire was, if anything, in decline. The American Revolution had helped

to sour the notion of empire, and powerful commercial interests were arguing for free trade and against the protectionism of the 18th-century imperial system. In 1837, the empire consisted of a jumbled collection of territories acquired in bits and pieces over the generations, administered partly by government and partly by chartered companies.

It is hard to believe, then, that during the period known as the Dual Monarchy, from

**The 'dual monarchy'**  
**Victoria with her husband Albert.**  
**The empire almost quintupled in size from**  
**her accession in 1837 to his death in 1861**



Victoria's accession to the death of her husband Prince Albert in 1861, the British empire almost quintupled in size thanks to territorial acquisitions in Asia, Africa, the South Sea and the Far East. By the end of the 19th century, it had become the greatest empire the world has ever known, covering a quarter of the earth's surface and a quarter of its population. What made this huge initial period of growth possible was a series of ruthless wars of conquest.

The one constant in this period of unprecedented expansion, always at the centre of the imperial web, was the formidable figure of Victoria herself: shaping, supporting and sometimes condemning her government's foreign policy – but never ignoring it. Though British monarchs no longer had the power to make or break governments, they still had, in the words of Walter Bagehot, the great constitutional historian, "three great rights": to be consulted, to advise and to warn. Aided and abetted by her hugely underrated husband, Prince Albert, Victoria made full use of these rights to influence government policy.

## Doing the right thing

Of course, Victoria took time to find her political feet. During the lead-up to the First Afghan War of 1839–42, for example, she was





**What a carve up**  
A 19th-century lithograph showing Queen Victoria, Germany's Wilhelm II, Russia's Nicholas II and Japan's Mutsuhito dividing China between them



briefed by her ministers but played a largely passive role. Told by her prime minister, Lord Melbourne, on 28 October 1838 that the Indian government had done the “right thing” by mobilising its troops for an invasion of Afghanistan, she made no objection. Young and inexperienced, she was content to follow the advice of her prime minister.

At first all went well, with the Anglo-Indian invasion force capturing Kabul and installing the pro-British Shah Shuja as its new sovereign in August 1839. But after just two years of Shuja’s hugely unpopular rule, a major revolt broke out in Kabul and quickly spread to the other major towns, effectively trapping the British garrisons in their forts and cantonments. With little hope of relief, the British commander at Kabul brokered a deal for the safe conduct of all British troops to the Punjab. So began the disastrous Retreat from Kabul which ended, on 13 January 1842, with the arrival of a single Briton, Dr William Brydon, at British-held Jelalabad. The rest of the 4,000 strong force, not to mention 12,000 camp followers, had been killed or captured during the horrific march through the snow-covered passes of eastern Afghanistan.

Queen Victoria’s chief concern, now, was for the fate of the British hostages, many of them women and children. For much of the summer, as the war swung in the balance, she agonised over their predicament. Finally, in November, came the welcome news that British troops had recaptured Kabul and released “all” the hostages. Such “brilliant successes” deserved recognition, wrote Victoria, and she was only too happy to approve honours for her senior commanders and a campaign medal, the first of its kind, for the troops.

## The balance of power

A further two major and eight medium-sized wars were fought by the British during the first quarter century of Victoria’s reign. Queen Victoria and Prince Albert (her first-cousin, whom she married in 1840) took a keen interest in all of them, and were staunch supporters of generals and pro-consuls who, they felt, had done their duty in difficult circumstances. So when Lord Ellenborough, the governor-general of India, was recalled in 1844 by Sir Robert Peel’s Tory government for launching an unauthorised war against Sind, Victoria voiced her disapproval. The decision to sack him was, she told Peel, “very unwise at this critical moment, and a very ungrateful return for the eminent services Lord Ellenborough has rendered... in India”. This time her objections were not heeded, though she would have more success supporting Lord Raglan, the British commander in the Crimea.

It helped that after the break-up of the Tory party in 1846 (over the repeal of the Corn Laws), ushering in a long period of coalition and minority governments, the monarch often

## In 1856 the Queen instituted the Victoria Cross, the first all-ranks gallantry award

held the balance of power – and Victoria was not afraid to use it. In 1850, she told Lord Palmerston, the headstrong Whig foreign secretary, that once she had “given her sanction to a measure”, she did not expect it to be “arbitrarily altered or modified by the minister”. When, a year later, he failed to consult either her or his cabinet colleagues over his approval of Louis Napoleon’s coup d’état in France, he was forced to resign.

Victoria’s chief concern, if British interests were involved, was whether her government understood the military consequences of its aggressive foreign policy. “The Queen wishes to ask, before she sanctions this draft,” she wrote to the foreign secretary in 1856, “whether the Cabinet have fully considered the consequences of this declaration to the Persians, which may be war; and if so, whether they are prepared to go to war with Persia, and have provided the means of carrying it on?”

The royal couple were most closely involved, both emotionally and practically, with the two major wars of the period: the Crimean War of 1854–56 and the Indian Mutiny of 1857–59. They worked hard to keep Britain out of the former war – the first European conflict for 40 years – but when it became inevitable they threw their energies into supporting the troops. On the departure of the Scots Guards to the seat of war, Victoria wrote: “They formed line, presented arms, and then cheered us very heartily, and went on cheering. It was a touching and beautiful sight; many sorrowing friends were there, and one saw the shake of many a hand. My best wishes and prayers will be with them all.”

## Socks knitted by the Queen

Later, when it became clear that British troops were suffering in the Crimea from a want of supplies and organisation, Queen Victoria personally superintended relief committees, knitted winter clothing (and encouraged her daughters and ladies-in-waiting to do the same) and eagerly seconded the efforts of Florence Nightingale. She also visited crippled soldiers in hospital and in 1856 instituted the Victoria Cross, the first all-ranks gallantry award, making it retrospective for those who had served in the Crimea. Albert was instrumental in the setting up of the Patriotic Fund, which raised £1m for the widows and orphans of the dead.

During the Indian Mutiny, Victoria’s sensitive and broad-minded reaction to rebel atrocities – “They should know there is no hatred of brown skin” – did much to calm the near hysterical cries among the British press and public for “fire and sword” retribution. And it was she who insisted that the 1858 ‘Proclamation’, announcing the transfer of authority from the East India Company to the Crown, contained a clause guaranteeing religious freedom. Albert’s clever diplomacy may even have averted a war between Britain and the United States in December 1861. But his death a few days later was very much the end of an era, not only because the Queen withdrew from public life for years, but also because, even when she did return in 1866, she was never as effective or influential as she had been with him at her side. Disraeli admitted as much when he wrote: “With Prince Albert we have buried our Sovereign. This German Prince has governed England for 21 years with a wisdom and energy such as none of our Kings have ever shown.”

Albert’s demise coincided, moreover, with a shift in the axis of imperial expansion from Asia to Africa that reflected the changing commercial and strategic concerns of the British government. During Albert’s marriage, only a couple of minor wars were fought in Africa (on the Cape frontier), whereas 10 were fought in Asia. Yet, of the 15 significant wars fought by Victoria’s troops after his death, 11 took place on the so-called ‘dark continent’.

Lastly, there was a change in the fundamental character of empire. Before the Indian Mutiny most Britons saw the empire as a “powerful force for the spread of civilisation”. So bloody were the events of the mutiny, however, that when it was over, many Britons concluded that the subject peoples of the empire were not capable of being civilised. Imperial rule became, therefore, not a mission but a duty: or, as Rudyard Kipling so eloquently put it, “the White Man’s burden”. ■

Turn the page for a timeline of wars through which Victoria’s empire achieved expansion ➤

Saul David’s books on the wars of the Victorian period include *Victoria’s Wars: The Rise of Empire* (Penguin, 2007)

### DISCOVER MORE

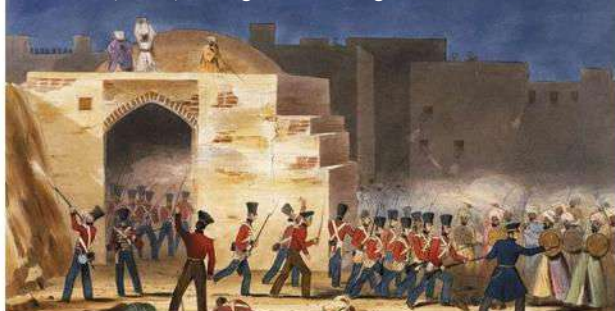
#### BOOKS

- **Britain’s Forgotten Wars** by Ian Herson (History Press, 2007)
- **Victorian Military Campaigns** by Brian Bond (Spellmount, 1994)
- **Queen Victoria’s Little Wars** by Byron Farwell (WW Norton, 1985)
- **Crimea: The Last Crusade** by Orlando Figes (Penguin, 2011)



# VICTORIA'S WARS

A 19th-century painting of the Storming of Ghuznee, 1839, during the First Afghan War



1839-42

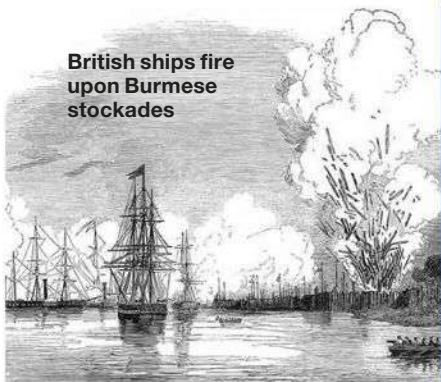
## First Afghan War

**REASON** To prevent the Russians from gaining a **diplomatic and military foothold** in Afghanistan from where they could threaten British India.

**OUTCOME** The withdrawal of all British troops from Afghanistan, but **only after General Pollock's Army of Retribution** had avenged the earlier destruction of a British force by retaking Kabul.



British ships fire upon Burmese stockades



## Second Burma War

**REASON** To prevent the Burmese kingdom of Ava from interfering with British shipping and trade.

**OUTCOME** The Indian government annexes Pegu province.

1852-53

Ludhiana Sikh infantrymen of the British Indian army



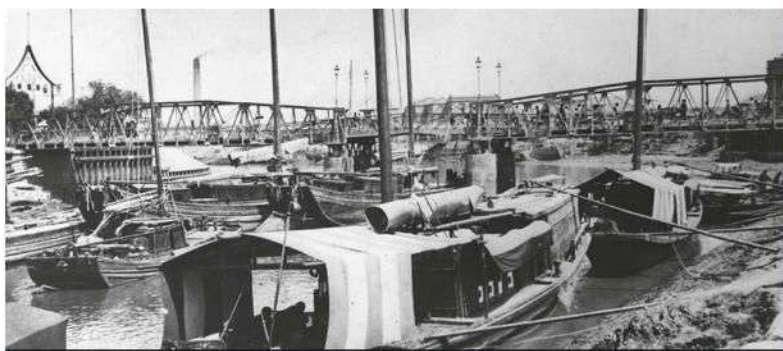
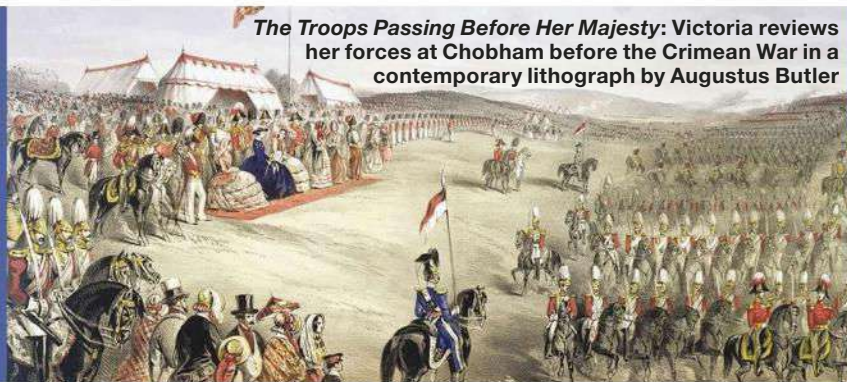
1854-56

## Crimean War

**REASON** To prevent the Russians from capturing **Constantinople**, the capital of the Ottoman empire, and threatening the overland route to India.

**OUTCOME** Russia agrees to the **demilitarisation of the Black Sea**, the cession of part of Bessarabia and the relinquishment of her right to protect the Christians of the Ottoman empire.

*The Troops Passing Before Her Majesty: Victoria reviews her forces at Chobham before the Crimean War in a contemporary lithograph by Augustus Butler*



Gunboats in Tientsin harbour, where trade was regulated after the war

1859-60

## Third Opium (or China) War

**REASON** To force the Chinese to ratify and implement the terms of the **Treaty of Tientsin** which had ended the previous war in 1858.

**OUTCOME** The Chinese ratify the treaty and sign a separate convention that **declares Tientsin a free port and cedes Kowloon** (located opposite Hong Kong) to the British.



# Battling on all fronts: some of the wars through which the British empire achieved its expansion in the reign of Queen Victoria



1839-42

## First Opium (or China) War

The Nanking Treaty of 1842 ended the First Opium War and gave rights to Britain

**REASON** To prevent the Chinese government from **stopping the lucrative opium trade** which provided the East India Company with much of its revenue.

**OUTCOME** The Chinese cede Hong Kong to the British and open up **four new treaty ports** to foreign trade.

1843

## Sind War

**REASON** To secure the **vital frontier province of Sind** and open up the lower Indus river for commercial exploitation.

**OUTCOME** The Indian government **annexes Sind**.

## Second Sikh War

**REASON** To assist the Maharaja of Lahore in **putting down a rebellion** by disgruntled Sikh chiefs.

**OUTCOME** The Indian government **annexes the Punjab**.

1848-49

## First Sikh War

**REASON** To repel an invasion of British India by the Sikh rulers of the Punjab, the largest and most powerful independent state in the sub-continent.

**OUTCOME** The Sikhs cede the Jullundur Doab to the British and agree to a British resident who acts as a diplomatic presence.

1845-46

GF Atkinson's painting shows the 1846 Battle of Aliwal, a victory for Britain during the First Sikh War



1856-57

## Persian War

**REASON** To force the Persians to **withdraw from Herat** in western Afghanistan.

**OUTCOME** The Persians agree to evacuate Herat and **renounce all claims to Afghan territory**.

Ye Mingchen, the governor of Guangdong, mounted resistance to the British



1856-58

## Second Opium (or China) War

**REASON** To prevent the Chinese from interfering with British-registered shipping.

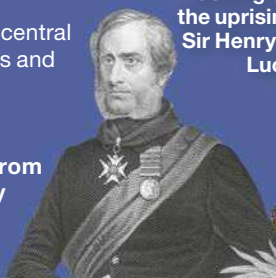
**OUTCOME** The Chinese **agree to open up their hinterland** to Christian missionaries and 11 more ports to foreign trade.

1857-59

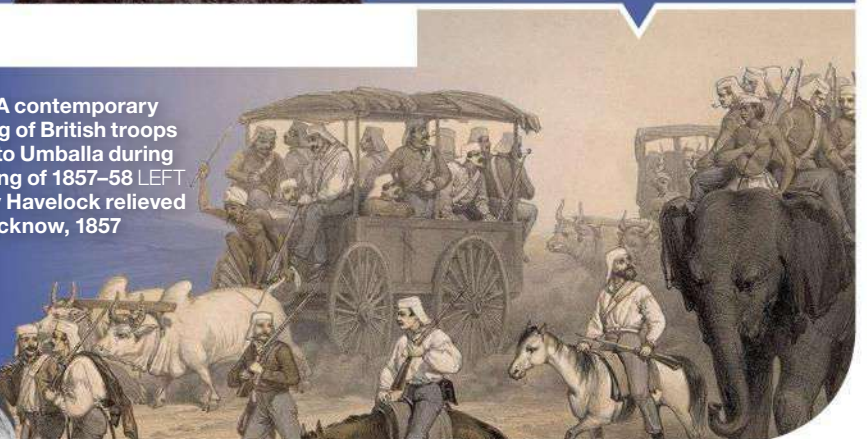
## Indian Rebellion

**REASON** To **put down an uprising** in northern and central India by mutinous soldiers and disaffected civilians.

**OUTCOME** The transfer of authority in British India **from the East India Company to the Crown**.



RIGHT A contemporary engraving of British troops rushing to Umballa during the uprising of 1857-58 LEFT Sir Henry Havelock relieved Lucknow, 1857

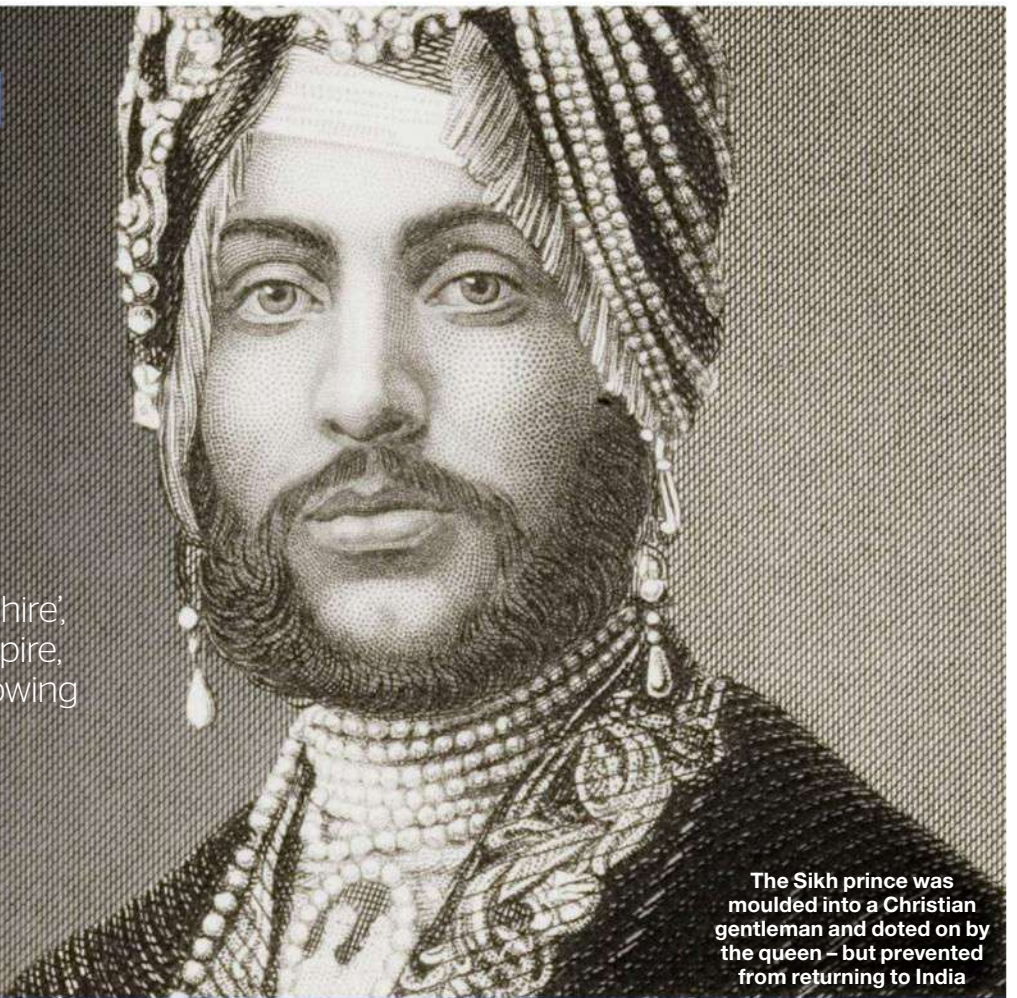




# Maharaja Duleep Singh

1838–93

The 'Black Prince of Perthshire', a pampered captive of empire, and a symbol of India's growing discontent with British rule



The Sikh prince was moulded into a Christian gentleman and doted on by the queen – but prevented from returning to India

In 1837, India, the strategic centre – the 'jewel in the crown' – of Britain's growing global imperial system was still run by a private company and was a patchwork of ad hoc administration. The Honourable East India Company did not control the entire subcontinent; some regions were semi-autonomous princely states, while others were completely independent.

The biggest worry was the Sikh kingdom of the Punjab. Its ruler, the great Ranjit Singh, had turned it into a powerful state with a large and well-resourced army, and its proximity to Afghanistan and Russia could have turned it into a mortal threat to British India overnight.

Ranjit Singh's death in 1839 led to instability and two Anglo-Sikh wars which resulted in the Punjab's complete subjugation. Along with the state, the British took control of the maharajah, Ranjit's Singh's 11-year-old son Duleep (Dalip) Singh.

In due course, the boy was converted to Christianity and was forbidden contact with most other Indians, including his own mother. Arriving in England in 1854 he was lionised by society and by the queen, to whom he presented the fabulous Koh-i-noor diamond, one of his late father's most

prized possessions, as a gesture of submission.

His captivity, though, was always luxurious. He toured Europe, joined the Carlton Club, became a freemason and lived in a succession of grand houses in England and Scotland. At Auchlyne he was known for his extravagant lifestyle, shooting parties and the love of Highland costume that earned him the nickname 'The Black Prince of Perthshire'.

His greatest love, though, was his later country estate at Elveden near Thetford, where he transformed the game reserve into one of the best in England. In every respect he appeared to be a British country gentleman.

He only returned to India twice, both visits tightly supervised by the British. The first was to bring his mother to Britain, the second to return her body to India for cremation three years later. By 1861 his mother was considered her too old and infirm to be a threat any longer,

*He presented the fabulous Koh-i-noor diamond to the queen as a gesture of submission*

but in Perthshire the two were inseparable, and she awakened in him an interest in his own culture and religion. His cousin, Thakur Singh Sandhanwalia was also an influence, as were Sikh religious prophecies.

In 1886, claiming that the British annexation of the Punjab was illegal, he tried to return to India, but was arrested at Aden. While there he reconverted to the Sikh faith.

The last years of his life were spent in Europe, mostly in Paris, intriguing for his return to the throne at Lahore, signing proclamations as the "implacable foe of the British government". He conspired with Russian representatives and Irish nationalists, plotting to retake the Punjab through a revolt of Sikh and Irish soldiers. These came to nothing, and in 1890 he was reconciled with the queen, who pardoned him. When he died, the British authorities refused to allow his body to be returned home in case it became a focus of nationalist agitation. He was instead buried at Elveden.

Duleep Singh married twice and his eight surviving children led lives of upper-class privilege in England, only one of them settling in India. Two were army officers and one was a prominent suffragette. **H**

Words: Eugene Byrne



# THE BRITISH EMPIRE

# 8 BIG

# QUESTIONS

Rampant expansion throughout the Victorian period built a vast, sprawling empire that spanned the globe. Here a selection of historians explore the themes and legacy of Britain's imperial past

Images of empire dominate the cover of the George V jubilee edition of *The Illustrated London News*, 1935. The empire over which Victoria had reigned didn't begin to contract until after the Second World War



# 1 What exactly was the British empire?

PROFESSOR LINDA COLLEY, PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

This seems to be a rudimentary question, but we can lose sight of it. People often make assumptions that they know what the British empire was, when in fact it was an umbrella term that covered a multitude of different types of spaces, different kinds of authority, different kinds of imperial connections.

One of the most influential but deceptive forces in shaping people's attitudes is that famous Victorian map of the world where the parts of the empire were coloured red. That gives a cut-and-dried impression of what the empire was, but what about the informal empire? In many ways, for instance, Argentina was substantially run by the British during the 19th century, but it was not coloured red because it was not a formal part of empire. Similarly, there are ways in which the US remained economically and culturally dependent on the empire for much of the 19th century.

The British often took the attitude that if they could run a place without having to go to the trouble of ruling it and administering it and sending in the troops, then why did they need a formal empire connection? If, as in Argentina, they could set up railroads and make them serve British commercial interests, as well as domi-

nating the banks and investment structure, there was no need for formal control.

The empire was not a fixed geographical and political entity and there were massively different experiences within it. In the late 19th century in New Zealand there was almost complete democracy for white people – much greater democracy than in Britain itself – but in large parts of Africa democracy was a distant dream. The quality of authority was always highly variegated.

Another point is that people often have preconceptions about where the empire was and often forget, for example, the Euro-

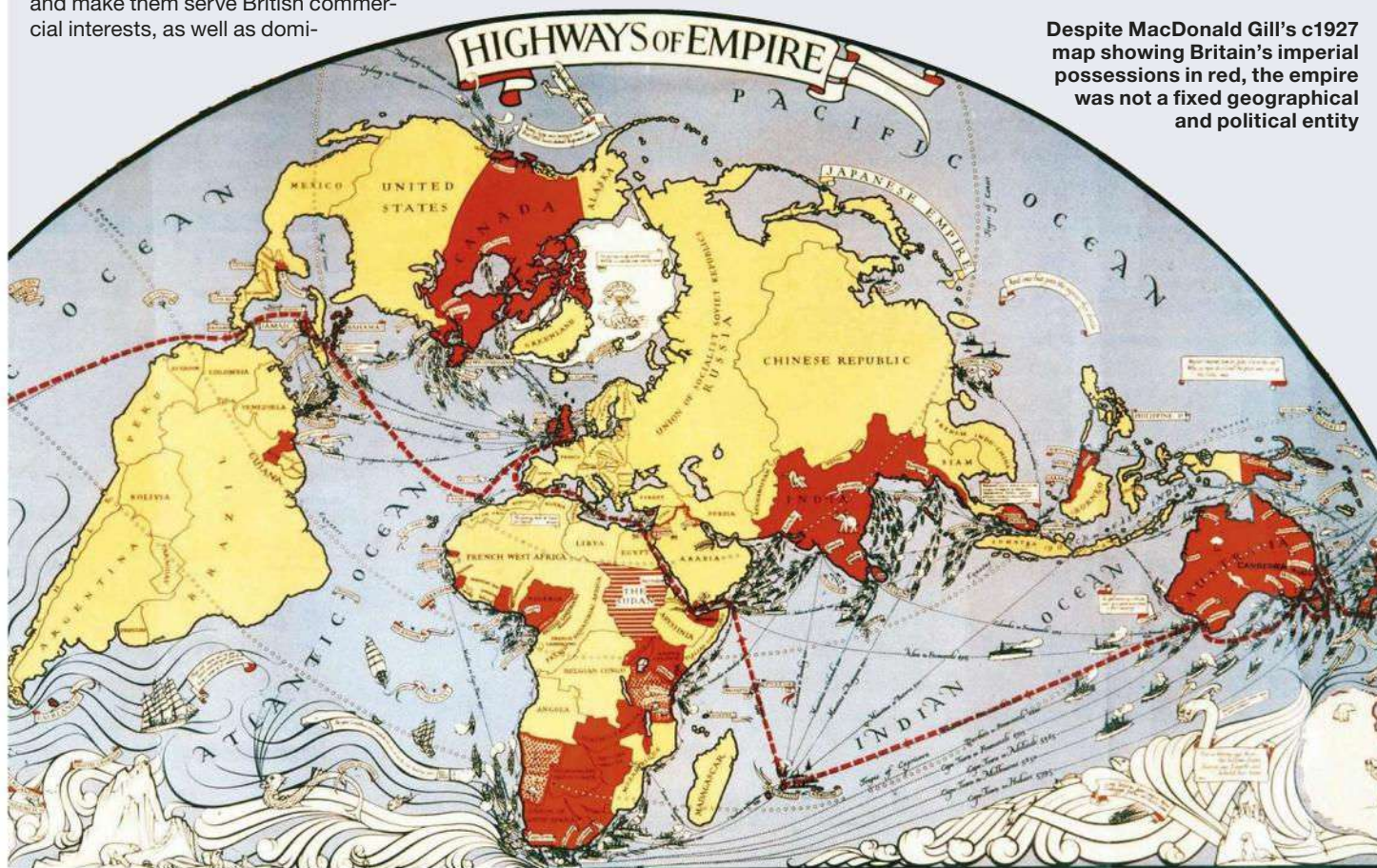
pean outposts of empire. Naval bases such as Menorca, Gibraltar, Cyprus and Malta allowed the Royal Navy to control the Mediterranean for a very long time, which was crucial in all sorts of respects. Partly, I suspect, because of current interests in racial politics, there can often be an unexamined belief that somehow the empire was about white Britons governing non-white people outside of Europe. That was undoubtedly one aspect of the empire, but of course there were lots of others as well.

Establishing what the empire was at different times, and exactly what varieties of empire existed, is crucial because choosing which version of the British empire to focus upon tends to influence the stories that historians write about it. There can be a temptation to select only those parts of the empire that support a desired thesis. Hence the importance of an eclectic and nuanced vision.

*Argentina was substantially run by the British, but was not coloured red*

Linda Colley is the author of *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837* (Yale University Press, 2009)

Despite MacDonald Gill's c1927 map showing Britain's imperial possessions in red, the empire was not a fixed geographical and political entity





Nurses at a military hospital in Lucknow, India, Christmas Day 1944



*The Irish were disproportionately powerful within the British army*

## 2 Was the British empire really 'British'?

PROFESSOR JOHN MACKENZIE, LANCASTER UNIVERSITY

The phrase 'British empire' was in common use from the union of parliaments in 1707. I think there was a theoretical position that lay behind the use of that phrase, which was that the British empire was intended to dissolve the ethnic differences within the British Isles, between the Irish, Scots, Welsh and English. The theory was that true Britons would be forged out of their imperial role, but I believe the opposite happened.

Migrants moved out of Britain to the empire and, instead of posing as Britons, they often remained affiliated to their original ethnic connections within the UK. They maintained their differences and this became significant later on because, when nationalist movements started to develop – particularly in Ireland – their worldwide reach came to be important.

Each of the ethnicities of the UK contributed different things to the British empire. Obviously the demographic majority was English and generally it was English administrative systems and English common law that was reproduced around the empire. Public schools also followed the English model. However, while the Anglican church thought it ought to be top dog, it was not allowed to be. There was too much resistance and too many heterogeneous Christian denominational positions within the empire, so the Anglican model never became established. That is illustrative of the way in which Englishness was resisted.

An obvious Irish contribution was Roman Catholicism, and if you look at the population of Catholic priests and nuns around the empire they were nearly

always Irish. The Irish also had a great influence in education; they contributed lots of doctors and were disproportionately powerful within the British army. A number of the significant generals within the empire were Anglo-Irish figures. The Scottish Enlightenment became important in the empire; for example, many of the universities were founded by Scots on the Scottish model. In addition, Scotland was an overproducer of graduates so there were very many Scottish doctors, engineers, foresters, botanists and teachers. That's one reason why, when commentators such as JA Froude went around the empire in the 19th century, they were constantly commenting on the fact that there were Scots everywhere.

Welsh nonconformity was very active in missionary activity, turning up in India and various other places. The Welsh language sometimes appeared as well. The Welsh were influential through their coal, which fuelled the empire, and their mining. Whenever you had mines established around the empire, it was often Welsh or Cornish who inhabited them.

I think that you can identify what I call the four nations theory of empire, with strands that come from England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales. They never fully amalgamated into something called Britishness. So when I look at the so-called British empire, what I begin to see are bits of a Scottish empire, bits of an Irish empire, a considerable English empire and also parts of a Welsh empire.

John MacKenzie is co-editor of *Scotland and the British Empire* (Oxford University Press, 2016)



### 3 How important were merchants to the first British empire?

DR SHERYLLYNNE HAGGERTY,  
UNIVERSITY OF NOTTINGHAM

There's a lot of debate about what constitutes the first British empire, but I see it as beginning in the 16th century, when the English started going across the Atlantic, and lasting until around 1807 with the end of the British slave trade. This was a commercial empire and merchants were integral to it.

As opposed to, say, Spain or Portugal, Britain was rather late at getting into the Atlantic world. By the time we had arrived all the gold and silver, valued as representative of a nation's comparative wealth, had pretty much been taken up by the Iberian powers. Instead we had to grow tobacco and sugar, which the state didn't think was as important as precious metals, and didn't directly invest in them. So the trading companies that went on to become the plantation colonies were financed by merchants. It was they who took the early risks and without them the empire might never have happened.

The merchants formed a symbiotic relationship with the state, which was very positive. Britain provided assistance from the Royal Navy, in the form of convoys, negotiated favourable

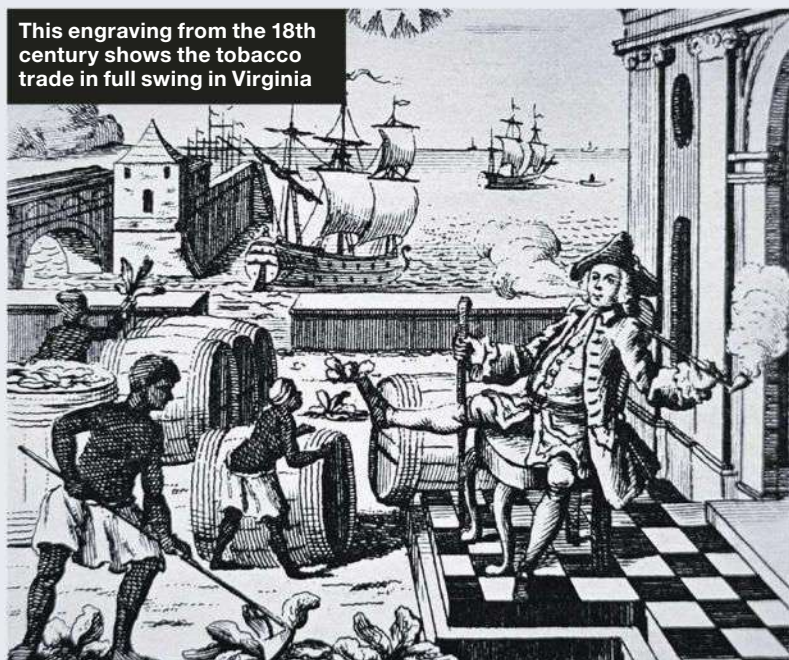
treaties following war and offered light taxes on customs and excise, while the merchants took the risks. They colonised on behalf of the state.

It amazes me how knowledgeable these merchants must have been. They had to know all about the different markets in various commodities, as well as how to manage the exchange rates. All this had to be done during a period of high uncertainty due to wars and credit crises. This meant financial risks too, in a time before limited liability. If you messed up you would lose everything,

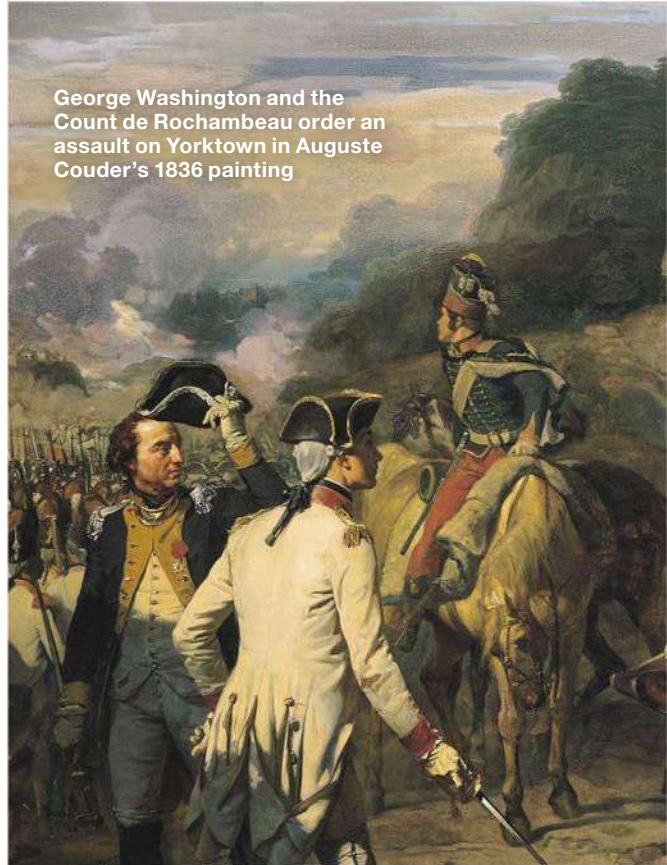
Some merchants were involved in the slave trade, which was integral to the growing of sugar and tobacco in the colonies. It seems awful to us now, but at the time they were only doing what the state had been encouraging them to do for 200 years. That is why 1807 was such a watershed for the British empire, because it changed that old symbiotic relationship between the state and the merchants.

Sheryllynne Haggerty is the author of *'Merely for Money? Business Culture in the British Atlantic, 1750–1815'* (Liverpool University Press, 2012)

This engraving from the 18th century shows the tobacco trade in full swing in Virginia



George Washington and the Count de Rochambeau order an assault on Yorktown in Auguste Couder's 1836 painting



### 4 What impact did the American revolution have on the British empire?

PROFESSOR MAYA JASANOFF,  
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

It used to be the prevailing view that the American revolution was a dividing line between the so-called first and second British empires. The first empire was characterised as being an empire of settlement, oriented around the Atlantic, and an empire that was in certain respects an extension of Britain. The second empire was characterised as being largely oriented towards Asia and involving direct rule over manifestly non-British people.

My view is that although things changed after the American revolution, there were some important continuities. For example, the British empire was still an Atlantic empire after the War of Independence, with lots of colonisation in Canada. I don't think it is right to talk about distinct empires.

The American revolution was undoubtedly a big defeat and yet I would say that it had a positive effect on the British empire. Losing the 13 colonies made British imperial governors and politicians take a different look at the empire that remained and think about new ways of governing it in the future. Britain clarified its relationship with the rest of the empire.





Colonial subjects tended not to be seen as the same as metropolitan Britons. Hierarchy got strengthened, with metropolitan Britons at the top as authority figures.

On the other hand, the British did recognise that certain measures needed to be implemented to keep imperial subjects happy. They recognised that you should give people rule of law and not tax them too much. So one of the great ironies is that the American patriots rose up with the great rallying cry, 'No taxation without representation', and yet it was actually the loyalists in Canada who won the taxation battle because they were extremely lightly taxed by the British after American independence.

The former American loyalists who remained within the empire themselves had an important role to play after the revolution. They were key agents and advocates for imperial growth after the loss of the 13 colonies. It was actually an American loyalist, who had sailed with James Cook, who first proposed colonising Australia in the late 18th century, and it was loyalists who advocated increased settlements in parts of Canada.

Although the USA was no longer part of the empire, it remained incredibly closely tied to Britain right up to the Civil War, and in some ways even beyond that. Economically both countries were dependent on the other and the United States was the main trading partner for Britain. It was also the chief destination for British emigrants. So when we think of the British empire as a global entity bound together by trade, emigration and cultural ties, we should remember the ways in which the USA remained involved.

*Britain recognised that measures were needed to keep imperial subjects happy*

Maya Jasanoff is the author of *Liberty's Exiles: The Loss of America and the Remaking of the British Empire* (HarperPress, 2012)

## 5 What was India's value to Britain?

PROFESSOR DENIS JUDD, LONDON METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY

In 1901 the Viceroy of India Lord Curzon said: "As long as we rule India we are the greatest power in the world. If we lose it we shall drop straight away to a third-rate power." I think Curzon was guilty of over-simplification.

The truth is that Britain was the world's first superpower because of her flying start in the industrial revolution, her financial and manufacturing domination, her enormous wealth, her stable political institutions, the global supremacy of the Royal Navy and her huge worldwide empire. India was more of a by-product of that preeminence than the cause.

Nonetheless, foreign observers (including Hitler) tended to see the British Raj in India as a stupendous achievement, and many Britons – such as Winston Churchill – were bitterly opposed to any moves to devolve power in the subcontinent.

But India's value to Britain was far more tangible than simply providing the nation with prestige. India was of prime importance to the British economy. Not merely was Britain's trade with India by the start of the 20th century responsible for a fifth of the nation's overseas commerce, but there was a large annual balance in Britain's favour. British loans to India secured a handsome return in interest, and Indian taxes and revenue paid for the salaries and pensions of the British administration there.

Huge amounts of British capital were invested in India and, in the case of the railway system, the British government actually guaranteed a good minimum percentage return for British investors. In addition, the Indian army was a readily available source of manpower for the exercise of British foreign policy, and at no cost to the British taxpayer.

At the start of both world wars, the Indian army was expanded by several million men. By 1900, nearly 40 per cent of Indian revenue was being spent on the military. Ruling India enabled Britain to function as a great military power, on a par with France or Russia, but without having to resort to the unpopular domestic expedient of conscription. No wonder India was so often referred to as 'the jewel in the imperial crown'.

Denis Judd is the author of *Empire: The British Imperial Experience from 1765 to the Present* (IB Tauris, 2011)



King George V and Queen Mary pictured in Delhi in 1911 during celebrations to mark their coronation



## 6 Did opium bankroll the British empire?

DR JULIA LOVELL,  
BIRKBECK, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

The opium trade is one of the great forgotten misdeeds of the British empire. We remember other shameful imperial episodes, such as the slave trade, or centuries of institutionalised racism. But the opium trade and the Opium Wars that Britain fought with China in the 1840s and 1850s were crucial to the running of the British empire, and yet are little known today.

Opium (a drug derived from the opium poppy) was grown in and shipped from British India to the south China coast, where it was sold for silver that British traders used to buy tea; the tea then travelled to Britain and, before it disappeared into British teacups, the government exacted its customs duties. These duties paid for a large part of the Royal Navy, so opium helped keep the British empire afloat.

Colonial administrations in Asia were also extensively funded by the management of opium-growing monopolies. As late as the 1850s, opium revenues accounted for more than 20 per cent of British government revenues in India. This was a significant part of the imperial economy.

The business grew throughout much of the 19th century. Between 1800 and 1839, sales of opium from British India to China went up tenfold: in 1800, British India was exporting around 4,000 chests a year to China; by 1839, annual exports had risen to almost 40,000 chests.

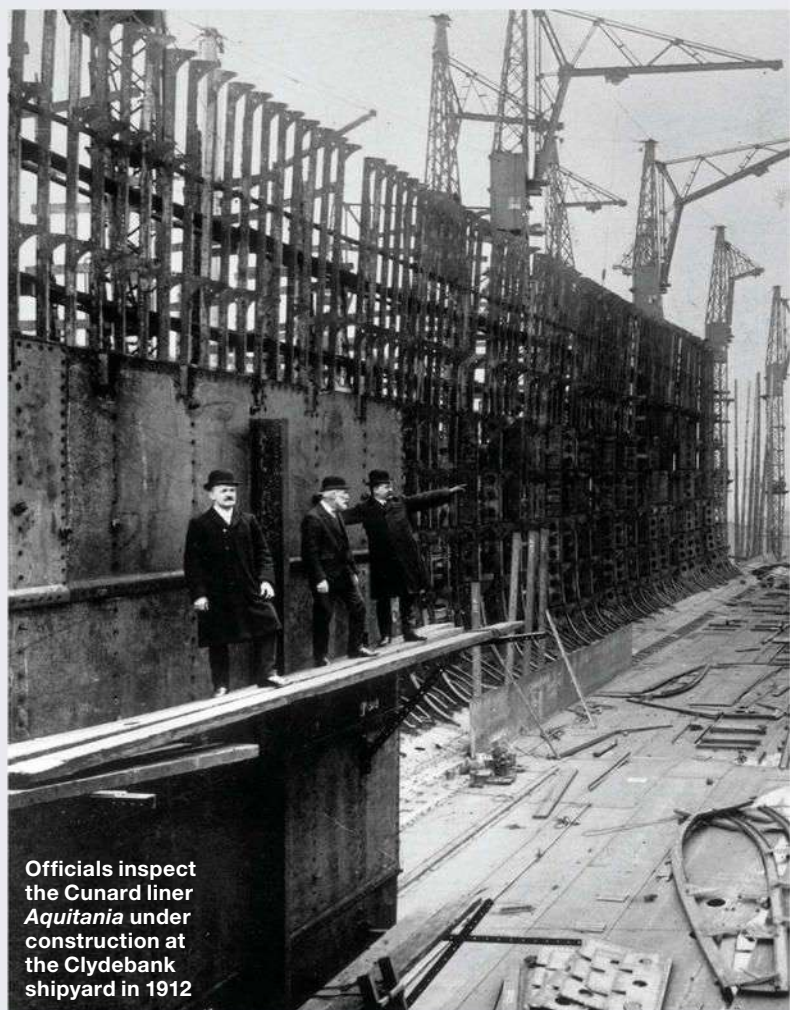
And Britain did more than just profit from drugs; it fought wars for them, too. In 1839–42 and 1856–60, it launched expeditions against China and its government's refusal to legalise the contraband opium trade. The 1860 Beijing treaty, concluding the second Opium War, finally forced the legalisation of the drug in China.

Why has the opium trade itself not been better understood? One historian recently wondered whether we remember the slave trade more clearly because the homegrown abolition movement leaves us with a happy ending. Late 19th-century British attitudes to the opium trade were more ambivalent, with the trade petering out reluctantly in the early 20th century.

But even if Britain has done its best to forget its opium-trading past, this is a history that has resonances for global politics today. In China, the Opium Wars remain at the front of public memory. They are seen as the start of a long-standing, ongoing western conspiracy to undermine the country. To understand China's troubled relationship with the west, you have to understand Britain's role in the opium trade.

Julia Lovell is the author of *The Opium War: Drugs, Dreams and the Making of China* (Picador, 2012)

A 19th-century French caricature of "an old English hag carrying an opium chest"



Officials inspect the Cunard liner *Aquitania* under construction at the Clydebank shipyard in 1912

## 7 Did Britain grow rich while the empire became poor?

PROFESSOR HUW BOWEN, SWANSEA UNIVERSITY

One would assume that Britain grew richer and the rest of empire got poorer because the whole point of empires is that they are exploitative. There's no point in having an empire unless it benefits the imperial power or metropolis. But identifying specifically where and who benefitted from the empire has proved to be difficult.

I'm interested in India, whose historians have been unable to quantify the 'drain of wealth' from the subcontinent with any degree of certainty. However, if you look at the localities of Britain and inflows of 'East Indian' wealth into industry, land purchase, country house ownership and so on, you can begin to get a much better sense of where the imperial

impact was being felt. Significant sums of money were generated by active participants in empire-building, those who went out to India and returned with their often ill-gotten fortunes. But the passive participants in empire – the stay-at-homes who invested in overseas enterprise – derived benefit from imperial expansion in a broader sense. Certain employment groups benefited particularly from British expansion, among them those in the marine industries that supported empire. Suppliers of commodities both for export and to sustain the whole enterprise – such as arms manufacturers and munitions suppliers – also profited.

There was however an uneven distribution across Britain.

AKG/GETTY





Specific regions – such as parts of Scotland and Wales, as well as London – were strongly linked to the empire. But you can be more specific than that and say, for example, that parts of the West Country derived sustained benefit for its flagging wool-textile industry through bulk exports to the subcontinent.

What happened to India is a complex question. To assume that everything the British did was damaging is incorrect. British enterprise stimulated a large export trade which might otherwise never have come into existence. However, there is no doubt that in the long run specific sectors of the Indian economy did suffer under the yoke of imperialism – the cotton industry was

profoundly damaged by cheap imports from Lancashire and Scotland from the 1830s onwards.

It's difficult to construct a cost-benefit analysis across the empire as a whole, but I suspect that an Africanist would paint a broadly similar picture. To establish fully the strength of the imperial impact, you would have to stitch together a number of case-studies linking different parts of the empire to specific localities in Britain. As things stand, we have only a hazy view of the extent of the economic influence of empire on Britain itself.

.....  
**Huw Bowen** is editor of *Wales and the British Overseas Empire: Interactions and Influences, 1650–1830* (Manchester University Press, 2011)

*The Indian textile industry was profoundly damaged by cheap imports from Britain*

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**Legacy of empire: Jamaican immigrants to the UK in 1955. Many inhabitants of Britain's colonial possessions considered themselves British**

## 8 Did the people of Britain and the empire feel part of a single British people?

**PROFESSOR PETER MARSHALL,**  
 KING'S COLLEGE LONDON

A SENSE OF being British was never the exclusive property of the peoples of the British Isles. On the eve of the American revolution, there was a strong sense in the 13 colonies that so long as you were white and Protestant then you were British or more specifically English. This did not, however, keep the Americans within the empire. There were different views of what being British or English meant and the Americans often felt that they were better freeborn Englishmen than the British themselves.

A sense of a common British identity was very strong in the later 19th century, particularly among people of British origin in Australia, Canada, New Zealand and English-speaking South Africa. This continued well into the 20th century and reached its height in the tremendous commitments made by these countries in two world wars. This commitment did not, however, stop them from developing a sense of being distinctively Australian, Canadian or whatever, at first within a British framework.

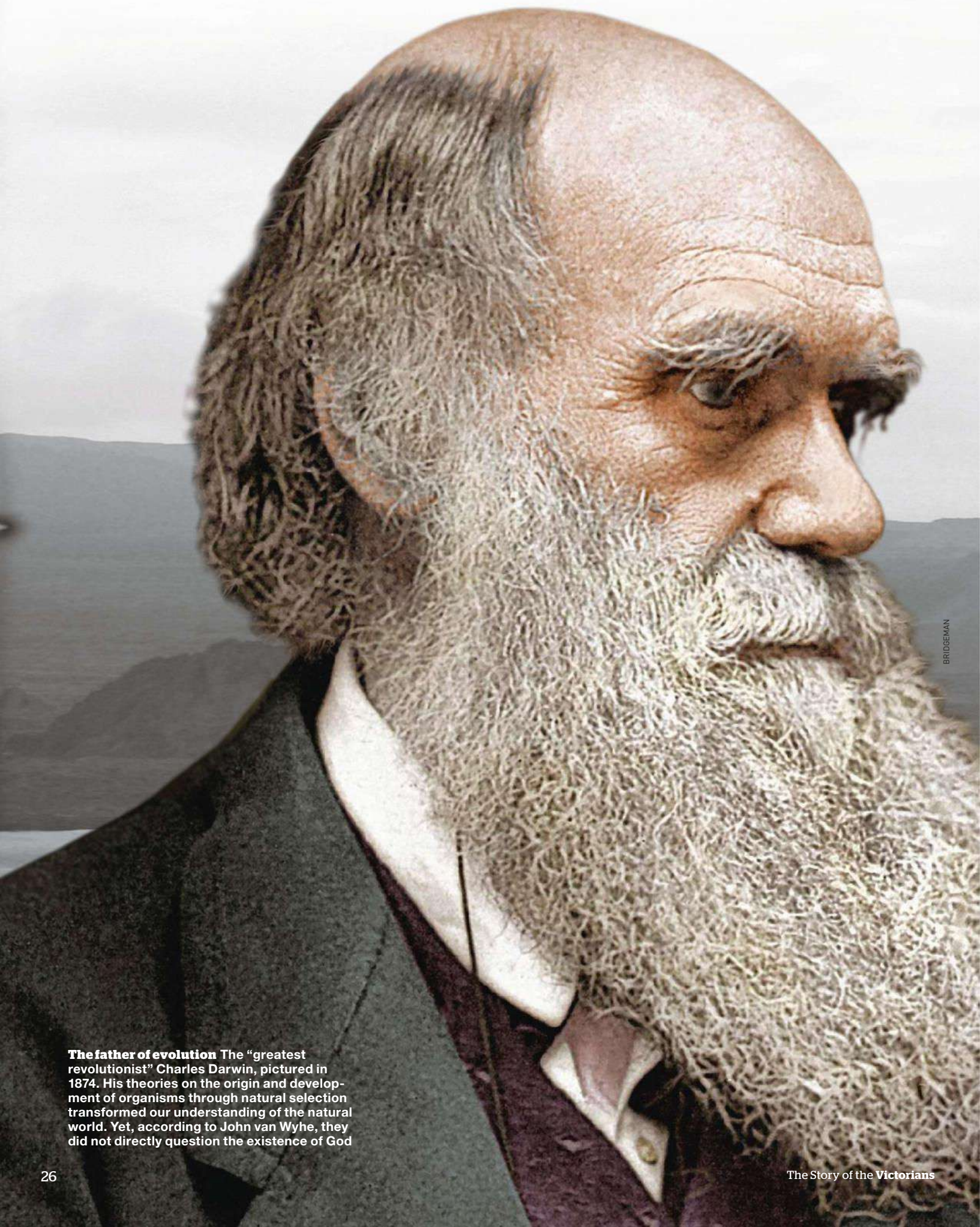
Many non-European people within the empire could also think of themselves as British. People in the Caribbean, as well as mixed-race people in southern Africa, or the elites in India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, could have a strong sense of British values. Andrea Levy's novel *Small Island* tells of Jamaican people who thought of themselves as British and were dismayed by what they regarded as the un-British standards that they encountered in Britain.

A sense of Britishness was not therefore something solely imposed from London. It was something that people throughout the empire took up for themselves, putting their own twist on it and sometimes opposing London in the name of British values as they interpreted them.

The extent to which people in Britain felt linked with the peoples of the empire varied widely. Enthusiasts tried to propagate ideals of empire and later Commonwealth unity, and the experience of family links and employment overseas gave these ideals some substance for many. It is, however, doubtful whether the mass of British people ever felt much sense of common identity. Attitudes of condescension towards all imperial peoples and downright racism towards non-Europeans were very common. **H**

.....  
**Peter Marshall** is the author of *Remaking the British Atlantic: The United States and the British Empire after American Independence* (Oxford University Press, 2015)





BRIDGEMAN

**The father of evolution** The “greatest revolutionist” Charles Darwin, pictured in 1874. His theories on the origin and development of organisms through natural selection transformed our understanding of the natural world. Yet, according to John van Wyhe, they did not directly question the existence of God





# Darwin VS God?

When Charles Darwin published his theory of evolution, it unlocked the history of life on Earth. But, asks **John van Wyhe**, did the naturalist really cause an almighty clash between church and science?

For many, Charles Darwin, the bearded Victorian sage pictured on the ten pound note, was the man who discovered we descend from monkeys. Yet he did no such thing. Writers before Darwin had made connections between humans and apes and monkeys because of our obvious physical similarities. But the theory for which Darwin is so celebrated was not aimed particularly at human ancestry at all.

The implications of Darwin's theory – most famously espoused in 1859 in *On the Origin of Species* – were so wide-ranging that a concise caricature of what it was all about was probably needed. “Darwin says we come from monkeys” was perhaps an understandable popular shorthand. It at least encapsulates both that species change and that the human species is derived from non-human ancestors. Of course it is also woefully inadequate since humans are no more descended from the monkeys we see around us today than you are from your own cousin.

Instead, Darwin set out to answer the question, how are new species formed? Where do they come from? What is their origin? His theory was not about the origin of life itself.

Although Darwin believed that question too would turn out to have a perfectly natural explanation, he thought that it was then beyond the power of science to answer.

## More fantasy than fact

We often hear that when *On the Origin of Species* was published there was a great outcry and an historic clash of science and religion. This is probably more fantasy than fact. Such stories can now be told and repeated only because we have forgotten just what was, and what was not, new and shocking in 1859. Much of what is commonly attributed to Darwin's book today had actually emerged in the half century or so before its publication. Such accounts assume that *On the Origin of Species* not only proposed a new and ambitious theory of evolution, but that the Earth was more than 6,000 years, that there was a progressive fossil record – and that it also proposed the precise lineage of human beings. According to such legendary accounts, all of this was presented to a blinkered and prejudiced public believing in the literal truth of *Genesis*. This would have been an historic clash indeed. But this is not what happened.

The Victorian public that first read or read about *On the Origin of Species* were, for the





## According to Darwin, all living and extinct species were related on a single genealogical family tree known as the tree of life

most part, not biblical literalists. For decades, the most enlightened writers in the fields of science and religion had accepted that much of the Old Testament, and *Genesis* in particular, had to be read in a metaphorical sense. Some believed that the creation story dealt only with the latest geological epoch – in which humanity appears on Earth.

The immensely ancient Earth was not Darwin's contribution, and it was not new. Geology had become a sophisticated science. No one knew how old the Earth was, but it was clear from the enormous numbers of geological formations that had been described and classified that so many long ages must have taken unimaginable lengths of time, millions upon millions of years. But no one knew how many. It was not until the discovery of radioactivity that accurate dating of rocks, and of the Earth itself, were feasible.

That fossil records revealed a succession of eras or ages of extinct 'living' things was also old news. It was almost universally accepted that these successive types of fossilised creatures were generally progressive through the oldest to the newest rocks. In the oldest rocks were the most primitive creatures. Shells preceded fish, which preceded amphibians, which preceded reptiles, which preceded mammals. This was true wherever one went throughout the world. In fact, the geological strata were dated according to which fossils they contained – because the order of succession had been worked out in great detail. No human fossils were known and hence these ancient worlds were believed to predate the creation of mankind.

The other common belief is that Darwin's book shocked Victorian religious and moral values. In reality, most of the heat had already been spent over radically naturalistic works published in the preceding decades. Books like George Combe's *The Constitution of Man* (1828) and the anonymously published (although later revealed to be by Robert Chambers) *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844) had shocked readers far more, with their visions of natural laws that controlled all of the universe, mankind included, leaving virtually no place for God. The later work was an evolutionary tour de force that began with the creation of the solar system from swirling clouds of dust and ended

with the prediction that mankind would go on progressing into something even more exalted.

These books were also read by huge audiences. By the end of the 19th century, *Vestiges* had sold around 40,000 copies and *Constitution* an impressive 300,000. In comparison, *On the Origin of Species* sold 50,000 copies by 1900.

### A slow stir

Such was the impact of *Constitution* and *Vestiges* that they had societies founded to oppose them and, in at least one case, were publicly burned. No such treatment awaited *On the Origin of Species* or its author. Indeed, by 1859 such reactions were unthinkable out of date.

Yet it would be a mistake to go so far as to claim that *On the Origin of Species* did not create a stir. Countless reviews eventually appeared, as well as pamphlets and books in support or opposition. Darwin's name was already well-respected due to his *Journal of Researches* (or *Voyage of the Beagle*, as it is now known), and numerous other major scientific contributions, that his views had to be taken seriously.

So Victorian readers were confronted with one of the leading men of science of the day publishing a work that purported to establish that, contrary to long-held belief, new species were not somehow created in each new

geological age to fit the new conditions. Instead, they were the lineal descendants of earlier species. These had gradually changed as the environment changed around them. Thus all living and extinct species were related on a single genealogical family tree – the tree of life.

A good starting point for Darwin's theory was the most familiar example of how animals and plants were known to change: domestication. Darwin explained that because farmers or breeders selected individuals with particular features to breed from they thus increased the proportion of the desired features in their flocks or crops. By repeating the process over many generations, extraordinary modifications had been and were being produced. For example, breeders had made such great alterations to some domestic pigeons that they'd have been described as different species if a naturalist had found them in the wild. Well-marbled beef was bred, sheep with legs too short to hop over fences, and so forth.

Darwin argued that if every life form which had ever lived on Earth reappeared, they could be laid out next to another, parent with offspring – and nowhere would one be able to indicate where one species ceases and another begins (except, of course, for extinctions). Instead one would see an endless chain of individuals in which each offspring differed no more from its progenitors than any child does from its parents.

Yet close study of many thousands of organisms showed that there was a constant abundance of variety or slight differences between all individuals. Darwin already knew this "from long-continued observation of the habits of animals and plants" – and was inspired by the grim population theory of Thomas Malthus. As such, he recognised that the vast majority of living things that were annually produced – from eggs to seeds to pollen – did not survive to reproduce. If they did, the entire Earth would be covered by any one species in a few hundred generations. Therefore most individuals were destroyed. Hence the tiny minority that survived to propagate had made it through what was, in effect, a struggle for existence. They did so because they had the right characteristics that enabled specifically them to slip through the gauntlet. Again, if reiterated over the thousands of generations of geological time, limitless change could result.

Darwin's theories inspired the whole gamut of reactions. Among the scientific community they ranged from contemptuous rejection to enthusiastic support. Darwin's wide array of arguments and evidence persuaded many that he had found the hidden bond that naturalists had been seeking which explained how all the different genera and species were related.

An engraving of the blue and yellow tanager, taken from Darwin's *Zoology of the Voyage of HMS Beagle* (Part 3: Birds, 1839)





Suddenly, the whole history of life on Earth and the key to its distribution and adaptations had been unlocked.

Other writers felt that Darwin's views were an attack on the role of a Creator in nature and drove a wedge between the moral and spiritual values and aspirations of mankind. Instead of tracing a lineage to the son of God, Darwin's theory suggested man had only beastly origins.

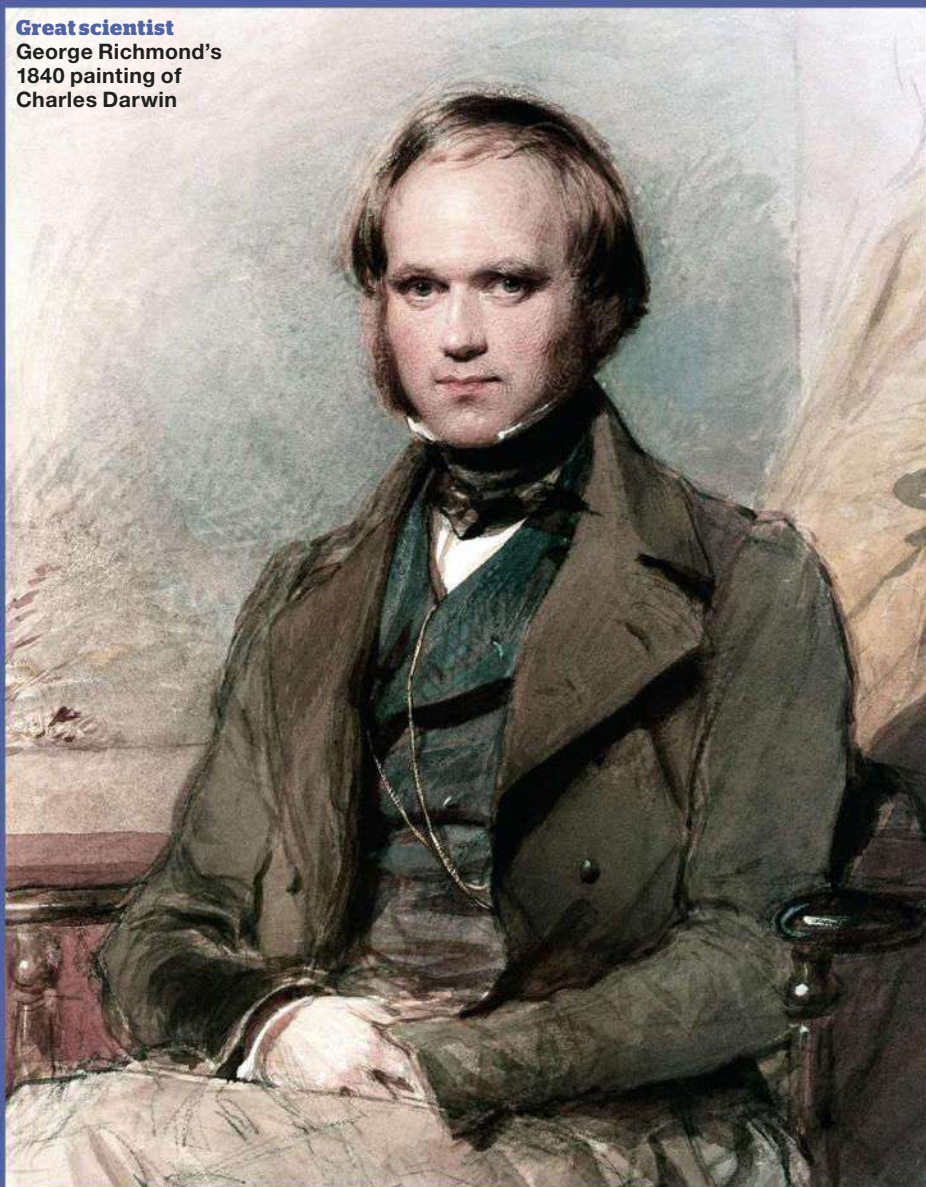
Others, like the Reverend Charles Kingsley, felt differently. He wrote enthusiastically to Darwin about his theory. In fact, such was his admiration that Darwin was granted permission to quote from the letter in the second edition of *On the Origin of Species*: "A celebrated author and divine has written to me that 'he has gradually learnt to see that it is just as noble a conception of the Deity to believe that He created a few original forms capable of self-development into other and needful forms, as to believe that He required a fresh act of creation to supply the voids caused by the action of His laws.'"

So, to religious thinkers of Kingsley's ilk, Darwin had uncovered a new law by which God governed the natural world. For such thinkers it was quite reasonable to reconcile Darwin's views with their religion.

Probably the most famous episode in the reception of Darwin's theory is the so-called Huxley/Wilberforce debate. The event took place on 30 June 1860, in the library of the new University Museum in Oxford, during a meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science. There are numerous, sometimes contradictory, accounts of what happened. The naturalist Thomas Henry Huxley's own rendition in a letter to Darwin sounds like what one wished one had said during an argument with hindsight. Bishop Samuel Wilberforce, so it is said, asked Huxley if he claimed descent from an ape on his grandmother or grandfather's side? Huxley, again according to legend, responded that he would rather be descended from an ape than a man who used his talents to bring ridicule into a serious scientific discussion. We will probably never know exactly what was said during this bout of verbal sparring, and it seems clear that the clash was as much about personalities as science versus religion. What we do know, however, is that Darwin's theory was vigorously debated by the scientific community.

Joining that debate, the phrenologist and botanist HC Watson wrote to Darwin shortly after the publication of *On the Origin of Species*: "Your leading idea will assuredly become recognised as an established truth in science, ie 'Natural selection'. It has the characteristics of all great natural truths, clarifying what was obscure, simplifying what was intricate, adding greatly to previous knowledge. You are the

**Great scientist**  
George Richmond's  
1840 painting of  
Charles Darwin



## Darwin: a biography

From Shropshire lad to world-shaking scientist

**Charles Robert Darwin (1809–1882)** was born in Shrewsbury, Shropshire. His father was the financier and physician Robert Darwin. His mother, Susannah Wedgwood, was the daughter of the famous potter. Darwin went to school at Shrewsbury before studying medicine at Edinburgh between 1825 and 1827. From 1828 and 1831 Darwin was at Christ's College, Cambridge, where he graduated with a BA degree.

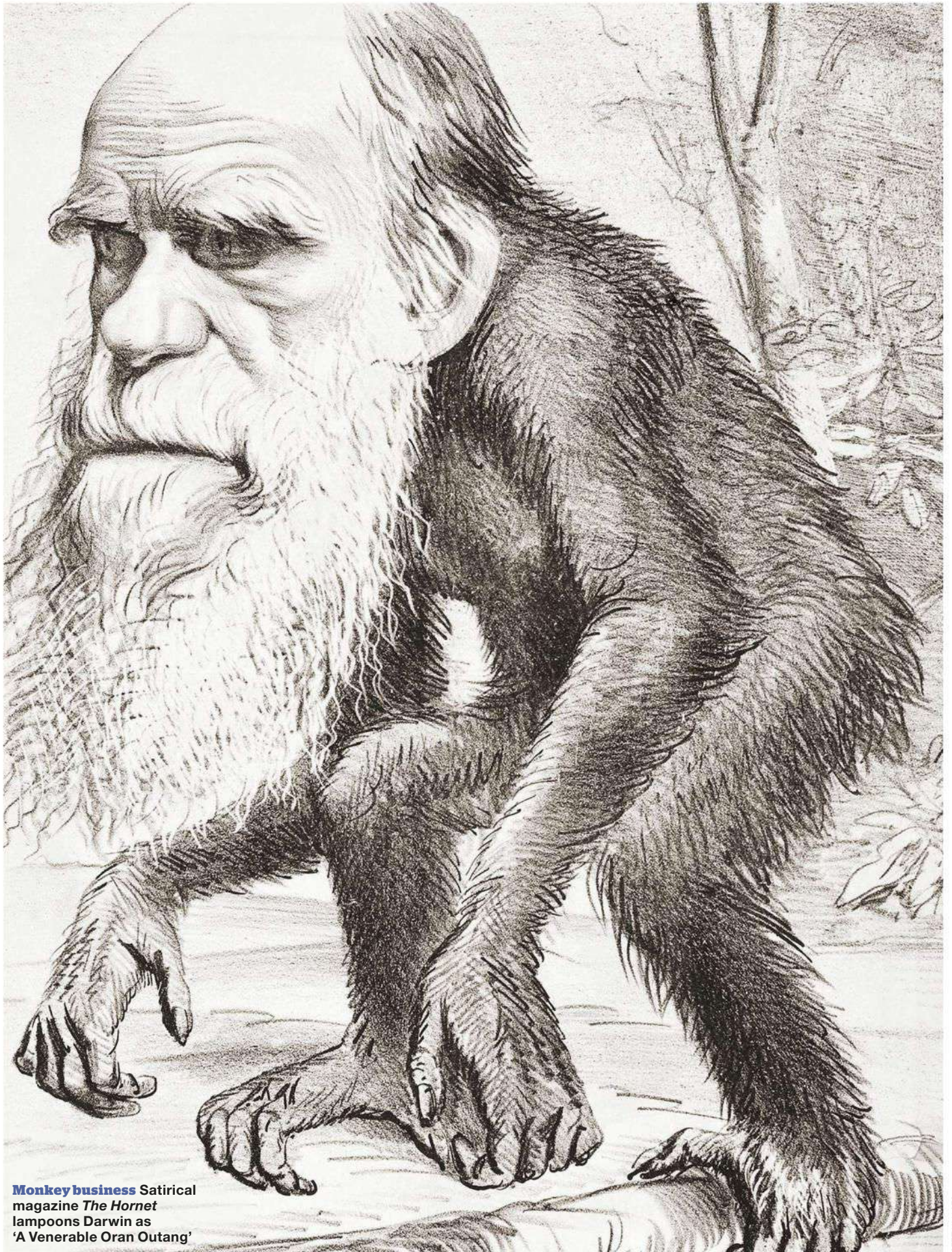
Soon after, he was fortunate enough to receive an offer to join the *Beagle*, a surveying ship, as naturalist during a round-the-world expedition. Darwin returned immensely experienced in geology and zoology. He published numerous works based on the *Beagle* expedition – well received in the scientific world back in England – including his famous *Journal of Researches (Voyage of*

*the HMS Beagle)*, and specialist works on the geology and zoology of the voyage.

Based on some of the last of his *Beagle* specimens, he began to study barnacles and ended up writing four volumes describing all known species. He then began to write up the theory on which he had been working for 20 years, his theory of evolution by natural selection. He published his great work in 1859. This, together with *The Descent of Man* (1871), established him as one of the foremost naturalists in the world.

Living quietly at his home in Kent, he continued to publish subsidiary evolutionary subjects showing, with great originality, further details and elaborations of how evolution by natural selection works. He died on 19 April 1882 and was buried with great honour in Westminster Abbey.





**Monkey business** Satirical magazine *The Hornet* lampoons Darwin as 'A Venerable Oran Outang'

GETTY IMAGES



# Suddenly the whole history of life on Earth and the key to its distribution and adaptations had been unlocked

greatest revolutionist in natural history of this century, if not of all centuries.”

## The idea takes hold

More and more scientists found that Darwin's explanation made sense of their particular areas of expertise. Articles and books soon began to appear praising Darwin's ideas.

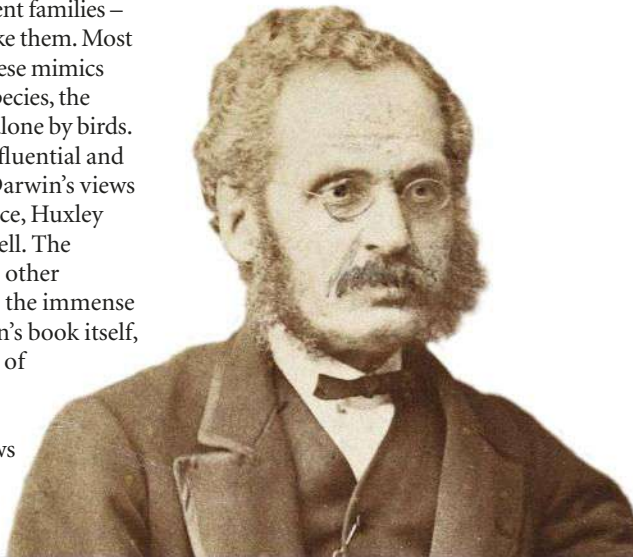
In 1861, Henry Walter Bates, a naturalist just returned from Brazil, showed that natural selection could explain the mystery of mimicry in South American butterflies. Bates had found that many types of brightly-coloured butterflies escaped being eaten because they were very unpalatable to birds. Wherever such species existed, different and rarer butterfly species – even those from different families – had evolved to look strikingly like them. Most significantly, the more one of these mimics resembled one of the inedible species, the greater its chances of being left alone by birds.

There was also a coterie of influential and active scientific supporters of Darwin's views including JD Hooker, AR Wallace, Huxley and, to some extent, Charles Lyell. The combined support of these and other respected figures, together with the immense argumentative power of Darwin's book itself, resulted in a dramatic overturn of previous views about the permanence of species.

As the years passed and reviews and counter-reviews appeared, the fact of Darwinian

evolution, the common descent of species, became increasingly accepted. It made sense of a host of diverse kinds of evidence that were otherwise inexplicable. Indeed, by around 1869, ten years after *Origin* first appeared, most scientists had accepted that Darwin was right. Of course, things were not the same everywhere. In Germany the theory was accepted rather quickly and with little fuss; in France it was largely ignored for many years. However, by the 1870s Darwin was

**Evolution admirers Findings from naturalists such as Henry Walter Bates soon added to the evidence for Darwin's theories**



## Myths and Mr Darwin

The number of myths and legends about Charles Darwin and evolution seems to be growing and growing.

One of the most common is that it is impossible to believe in God and evolution at the same time. This myth has perhaps been strengthened all the more by the anti-religious fervour of outspoken atheists. But the fact is, it is possible to believe in God and evolution. This is as true today as it was in Darwin's time. Many people wrote to Darwin to ask him this question and he became rather tired of answering it. Yes, he would reply, of course you can believe in both. And to demonstrate this he supplied lists of prominent scientists who did exactly that.

Another widespread legend is that Darwin was so afraid of what the reactions to his

theory would be that he kept it a secret for 20 years. On the contrary, when later answering claims that he exaggerated his originality in *On the Origin of Species*, he replied that, before publishing in 1859, "I formerly spoke to very many naturalists on the subject of evolution, and never once met with any sympathetic agreement". This appeared in the sixth and final edition of *On the Origin of Species* in 1872.

Another myth is that Darwin either converted to Christianity on his deathbed (he was an agnostic) and/or recanted his evolutionary theory as he approached death. Both are quite untrue, and his family wrote many letters denying these claims when they first began to circulate around 1915.

internationally regarded as a scientific revolutionary who had transformed the study of the natural world.

Yet, surprisingly, the other key Darwinian idea, natural selection, was much less welcome. As scientific and non-scientific readers came increasingly to accept the Darwinian concept of common ancestry for species, the view that natural selection was the primary mechanism was often sidelined or rejected. Huxley welcomed the big picture of the evolution of life with open arms. Yet natural selection – that aspect of the theory that made divine intervention unnecessary – he could not accept. Many suggested instead that the variations that natural selection picked out were themselves divinely guided or caused. The bottom line seemed to be: was there a meaning or intention behind how life changed? According to Darwin, there were only natural reasons.

All these doubts notwithstanding, from the perspective of those who lived through that time, and even from hindsight today, that fact – that Darwin's views were largely accepted throughout the international scientific community in 10 to 15 years – is remarkable. Scientists found that new avenues were thrown open to their particular researches. Countless confirmations and refinements to Darwin's views were published. New fossil forms were discovered which filled gaps between already known groups, just as Darwin had predicted.

What is perhaps so extraordinary about Darwin is how far he went beyond his contemporaries. If he had died on the *Beagle* voyage, instead of Darwinism we would probably not have Wallaceism or anyone-else-ism. Instead, as with so many other sciences, over the succeeding decades a community of workers would have come up with the many different aspects that constitute Darwin's theory. Therefore the reason Darwin is special, and the reason he is still remembered as the father of evolutionary biology today, is that he advanced science so far on his own. He not only established evolution by natural selection, long before his contemporaries, but he did so much of the work of substantiating it and of convincing the scientific community of its veracity himself. **H**

Dr John van Wyhe is a historian of science at the National University of Singapore. He is the founder and director of Darwin Online, the world's largest online resource on Charles Darwin

## DISCOVER MORE

### BOOKS

► **Darwin: The Story of the Man and his Theories of Evolution** by John van Wyhe (Andre Deutsch, 2008)

► **Darwin's 'Origin Of Species': A Biography** by Janet Browne (Atlantic Books, 2007)



# THE VICTORIAN WAR ON TERROR

In the 1880s, Irish republicans terrorised London with a diabolical new invention – dynamite. The Home Office hit back with a new weapon of its own, Britain's first secret police force, writes **Shane Kenna**

A policeman feels the full force of a blast in this illustration – from the 7 June 1884 issue of *The Illustrated Police News* – depicting a Fenian attack on Scotland Yard. The Fenians' dynamite campaign of the early 1880s provoked a radical response from the British government

BRITISH LIBRARY NEWSPAPERS





THE EXPLOSION AT SCOTLAND YARD

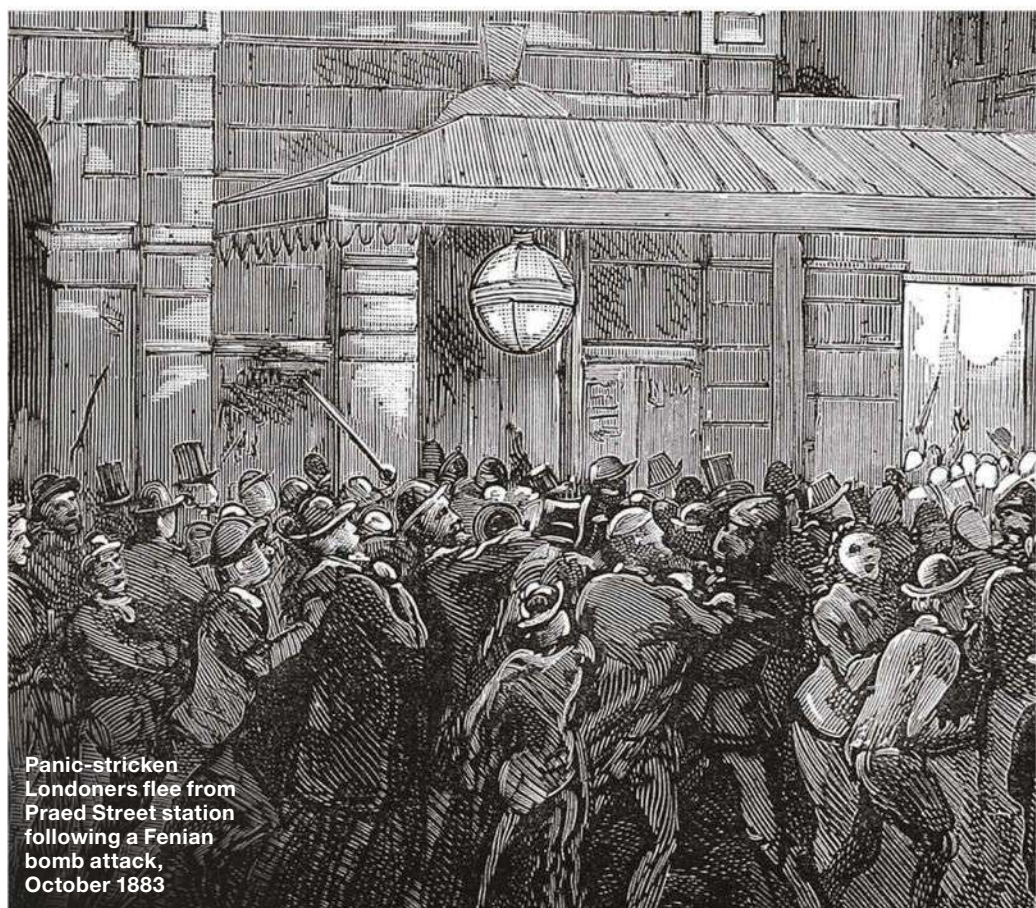


**A**s a train entered London Underground's Praed Street station on 30 October 1883, a bomb was thrown from a first-class carriage. It exploded as a third-class carriage passed. The driver, Stephen Harris, recalled that every light on the train was extinguished and there was a loud shriek of horror among the passengers. The force of the blast threw the station signalman, Henry Hartrupp, towards a nearby wall. His signal box was shattered by the impact of the explosion. As the foggy dust bellowed out of the tunnel, terrified Metropolitan line commuters stampeded out of the station in hysterical confusion. Station workers ran toward the wrecked carriage as the injured were treated at the station or in the nearby St Mary's Hospital. Dozens were hurt, with injuries including shock, facial wounds, burns and deafness.

Within minutes, a further explosion was heard halfway across the city, this time at Charing Cross. Another bomb had been thrown toward the lower carriages as a train left for Westminster. Such an audacious bombing attack on public transport had never been experienced before in western Europe, and the following day hundreds of commuters avoided the Underground network as a sense of terror swept through London. Addressing this fear, 600 Underground railway workers denounced the bombings and called upon commuters to go about their daily lives unintimidated. As the home secretary Sir William Vernon Harcourt despondently lamented: "Things were never worse than they are now".

Further attacks followed. On 25 February 1884, time-delayed explosives were deposited in luggage bags in several railway cloakrooms, including Victoria, Ludgate Hill, Charing Cross and Paddington. With the exception of the bomb at Victoria, each timer failed. At Victoria, the force of the blast annihilated the cloakroom. The station's ticket office was badly damaged and the glass veranda roof was shattered. Such was the devastation that 30 trucks were required to take away the debris. Once again the public was terrified. Alarming rumours suggested that the Royal Courts of Justice, St Pancras station and the British Museum had been the subject of further attacks.

Rushing to other railway stations throughout London in the aftermath of the blast, police and railway staff frantically searched cloakrooms and tore open baggage, discovering the remaining explosives. The stations were saved by the malfunctioning of the bombs, and the Home Office praised "a most miraculous escape".



Panic-stricken Londoners flee from Praed Street station following a Fenian bomb attack, October 1883

*Such an audacious bombing attack on public transport had never been seen before in western Europe. It aimed to bring the Irish question to the heart of British politics*

These explosions were part of the 1881–85 Fenian dynamite campaign. This had the aim of bringing the Irish question to the heart of British politics, a prelude to the establishment of an Irish Republic. To meet the Fenian challenge, a new detective department was formed at Scotland Yard under Adolphus Williamson and Inspector John Littlechild on 17 March 1883.

### Political policing

Known as the Special Irish Branch, the new force initially consisted of four CID officers and eight uniformed policemen. Its very existence represented a remarkable innovation because there was no tradition of detective work within British policing. This in turn was partly because the liberal political culture of the era in Britain was antithetical to secret or political policing, which were regarded as dangerously immoral, intrusive and unambiguously

continental, best left to the French or Russians. However, the approach of Special Irish Branch was still shaped by this liberal tradition. Rather than employing agents, it sought to prevent Fenian attacks by using a strategy peculiar to Victorian Britain: picketing. This involved identifying individuals as threats to national security.

Once identified, plain-clothes policemen would maintain a brief surveillance of the suspect, with no attempt to incubate informers. After monitoring a suspect's movements, the officers would follow their observations with an arrest and questioning of those believed to be 'dynamitards'. If the evidence was solid against a prisoner, and he could not account for himself, he was charged. Foremost in this strategy was a preference for openly recorded arrests and clear evidence.

In the aftermath of the Victoria bombing, Special Irish Branch carried out a thorough





investigation, but was unable to find the dynamitards. At the Home Office, Sir William Vernon Harcourt was growing increasingly frustrated with the police response to the Fenian conspiracy, and he looked towards Ireland for a new approach.

On 6 May 1882, Lord Frederick Cavendish, the newly appointed chief secretary for Ireland, and his assistant Thomas Henry Burke, the most senior civil servant in Ireland, were assassinated in Dublin's Phoenix Park. The two were murdered by Fenians known as the Invincibles. In the aftermath of the killings, the Irish police force was reorganised. At its apex was a permanent secret service department known as the Office of the Assistant Undersecretary for Police and Crime. This department sought to neutralise conspiracies through intelligence. To this end, it employed spies and agents provocateurs.

### Secret service

Edward George Jenkinson headed the new unit. Jenkinson had formerly served in India, where he rose swiftly through the ranks of the colonial administration before his career was cut short by ill-health. He returned to Britain to work as private secretary to Lord Northbrook and then the Irish viceroy, Earl Spencer. It was Spencer who appointed him

to head the secret service, believing that, as a former official in India, Jenkinson had an understanding of colonial policing alien to Victorian Britain. Harcourt was impressed by Jenkinson and demanded that the spymaster be co-opted to the Home Office to counter Fenian dynamitards. However, he understood that any official appointment would be incredibly unpopular in Britain because of the widespread suspicion of secret policing – so Jenkinson's employment was strictly unofficial.

Settling into his new office in room 56 of the Home Office building in London, Jenkinson, with a cabal of officials working alongside him, represented a significant threat to Special Irish Branch. Regarding British police as "second-rate detectives" who had no experience with political violence, Jenkinson's operation was entirely reliant on a circus of spies, informants and agents provocateurs. It was maintained outside the rule of law and veiled in secrecy. On Jenkinson's instructions, his operatives were to have no communications with Scotland Yard. Unknown to Special Irish Branch, Jenkinson's agents were handled by detectives of the Royal Irish Constabulary, officially in London to advise and support Scotland Yard in counter-Fenian activity.

That this secret policing network was regarded as a serious threat to Victorian understandings of liberality is confirmed by the mournful comments of one contemporary. "Besides the terrible results to person and property from the use of dynamite," the commentator lamented, "there is arising a most serious, and possibly long enduring injury to liberty...in England a new secret political police under the special direction of the Home Office, is developing to meet the new form of monstrous pervasion of chemical knowledge as an agency in political warfare."

On the ground, this "political warfare" called for someone to act as an agent spotter, locating potential informers within Fenian circles. This role fell to Jenkinson's deputy, Major Nicholas Gosselin, an Irish Royal magistrate from County Cavan and former Royal Welch Fusilier.

One of the new police unit's most audacious agents was 'Red' Jim McDermott. On the face of it, McDermott was a vocal supporter of bombing campaigns, who famously exclaimed at a Fenian conference in America: "Not a cent for blatherskite [talk] but every dollar for dynamite". Yet, in reality, he was an agent provocateur who'd used secret service money to bomb Britain and had been employed by Jenkinson to push potential conspirators towards taking action.

## Who were the Fenians?

Irish revolutionaries demanded independence and believed in the power of violence

Established in 1858 as an international conspiracy among the Irish and Irish diaspora, Fenianism was the most important revolutionary tradition in Ireland. The Fenians sought to establish an Irish republic and rejected the union between Britain and Ireland (which had come into effect in 1801). Fenians were motivated by a belief in the power of violence to coerce the British government to consider Irish independence (which it had so far refused to countenance). In 1867, following a failed uprising in Ireland, they reorganised, and from 1881 to 1885 mounted a bombing campaign in Britain.

Known as the Fenian dynamite campaign, it was inspired by advances in science – particularly the invention of dynamite, which was perceived to redress a power imbalance and offer a cheap mode of warfare. The dynamite campaign was maintained by two Irish-American Fenian groups: Clan na Gael and a smaller dissident organisation, the Skirmishers.

While the Skirmishers were responsible for several small-scale bombings between 1881 and 1883, they launched their most noteworthy attack on Whitehall, the administrative centre of the British government. Their bombing campaign forced the larger Clan to adopt a similar campaign or face an increasing lack of authority in Irish America. Resolving to employ "a system of warfare characterised by all the signs of Nihilism", the Clan launched a bombing campaign across London in the winter of 1882/83.

Their choice of targets represented an aggressive expansion on the earlier Skirmisher campaign, detonating explosives on the London Underground, railway stations and London city centre. Such was the Clan's audacity that they planned to destroy the London bridge network, plunging the city into economic chaos, and detonated simultaneous explosions at the Tower of London and in the Chamber of the House of Commons.

With secret service backing, McDermott worked up a conspiracy to carry out simultaneous attacks on Ireland, Scotland and England. This resulted in the arrest of several Fenians across Britain and Ireland. To save face, McDermott was arrested in Liverpool, where he had arrived from the USA, supposedly to rescue the Fenians he



had allegedly entrapped. With Home Office support, he was tried for his role in the supposed bombing conspiracy, but following official intervention, the case collapsed for lack of evidence. On Jenkinson's initiative, Nicholas Gosselin shuffled McDermott out of Britain to Europe, where he assumed the name Count de Neonlier.

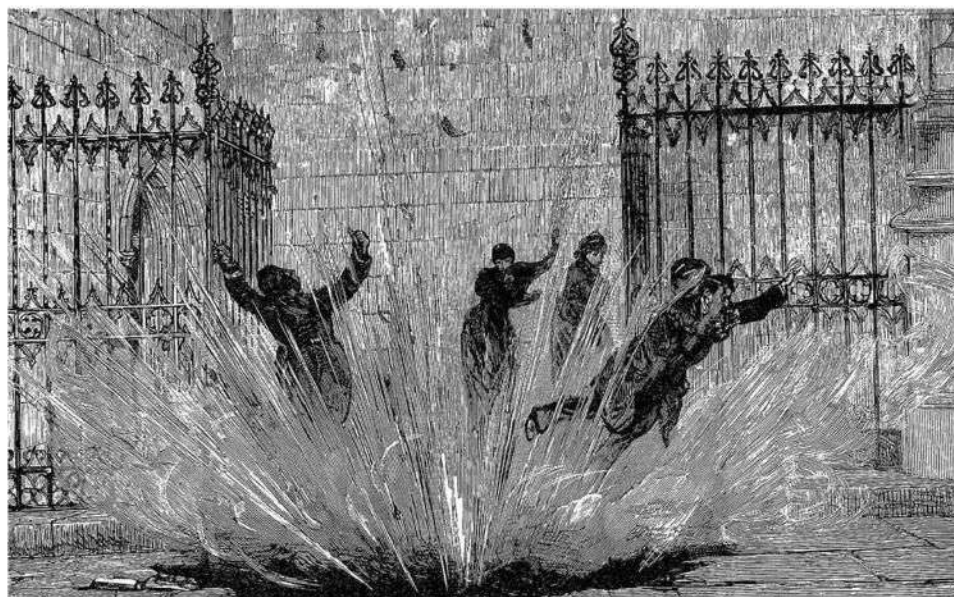
Between 1883 and 1884, Gosselin secured the services of a Liverpool Irishman named Daniel O'Neill. O'Neill told him that a Fenian living in Birmingham, John Daly, planned to assassinate the British government by throwing grenades from the visitor's gallery in the House of Commons. Jenkinson investigated O'Neill's claims, and discovered that the bombs were due to arrive from America in April 1884.

Rather than moving in immediately, Jenkinson and Gosselin allowed the bombs to reach Britain unmolested by police and the customs service. Their plan was for O'Neill to give the bombs to Daly in order to facilitate his arrest. The operation went smoothly and Daly was sentenced to life imprisonment. Gosselin remembered him as "the most bloody-minded fanatic since Guy Fawkes".

### Escape to Australia

O'Neill was internally tried by the Fenians for his role in the counter-conspiracy, but Jenkinson had employed one of O'Neill's inquisitors as an agent, and the Irishman escaped into anonymity in Australia. In the 1890s the nature of Daly's arrest was exposed and the Home Office launched an investigation into allegations of illegal activity. Under interview, Gosselin protested: "In justice to me, an exhaustive inquiry having been made...the case should be, as far as the Home Office is concerned, closed forever."

April 1884 saw the emergence of a significant threat to Jenkinson's methods –



The weekly newspaper *The Graphic* shows a bomb exploding outside Westminster Hall. In 1885, the Fenians targeted some of the major symbols of British power

in the form of a new commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, James Monro. Like Jenkinson, Monro had Indian experience and had previously worked to undermine secret societies in Bengal. There, however, the similarities between the men ended. Monro detested Jenkinson's reliance on secrecy, declaring that it had no place within British policing. The assistant commissioner also argued that Jenkinson's clandestine operations endangered the credibility of the law and encouraged moral corruption.

Monro complained to the Home Office that two police forces were operating against each other, a legal force and an illegal one. He found that Jenkinson (pictured below) was continuously trumping Scotland Yard, and remonstrated about the use of spies and agents provocateurs within existing Fenian conspiracies. He thought these secret operations were dangerous because they left open the real possibility that Fenian

dynamitards could carry out an attack, and he argued that Jenkinson's intelligence strategy was systematically designed to undermine the rule of law. What's more, Monro was prepared to back up his words with action, ordering that Jenkinson's people be shadowed and arresting several key individuals in his operation.

Monro eventually won the day. Jenkinson was dismissed in 1887, his secret operation disbanded and his clandestine network replaced by the Special Irish Branch.

Burning his papers rather than handing them over to Monro, Jenkinson destroyed a potentially hugely important archive of shared British and Irish history. Jenkinson himself was largely forgotten, but it's perhaps time we looked anew at his legacy, to see him as someone who represents the first emergence of a British secret service with a heavy interest in political intrigue.

In 1909, the War Office officially established the Secret Service Bureau. Its director, Irishman William Melville, had been an active participant in the battle against Fenian dynamitards. Ironically, though, he wasn't one of Jenkinson's men – someone who operated in the shadows – but a founder member of the Special Irish Branch. **H**

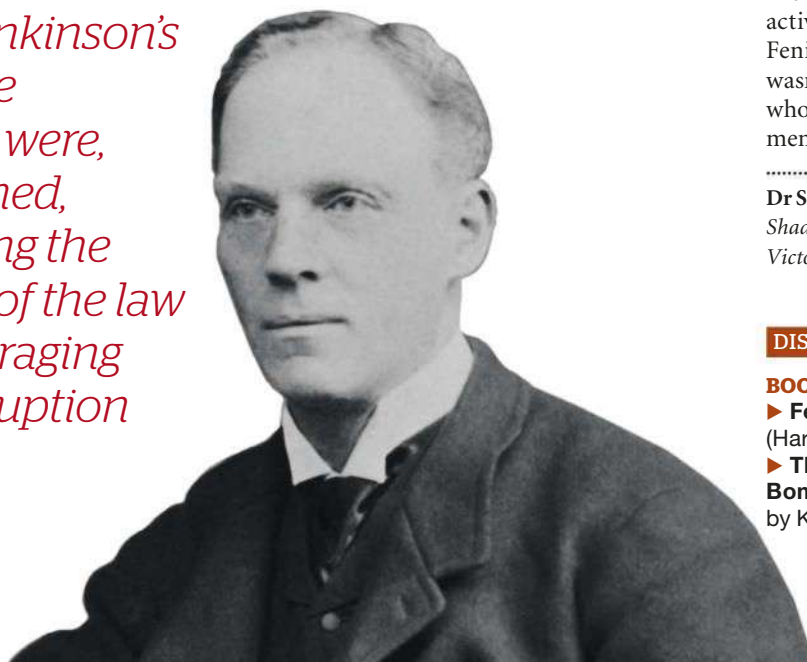
**Dr Shane Kenna** is the author of *War in the Shadows: The Irish-American Fenians Who Bombed Victorian Britain* (Merrion Press, 2013)

### DISCOVER MORE

#### BOOKS

- **Fenian Fire** by Christy Campbell (Harper Collins, 2011)
- **The Dynamite War: Irish American Bombers in Victorian Britain** by KRM Short (Gill & MacMillan, 1979)

*Edward Jenkinson's clandestine operations were, it was claimed, endangering the credibility of the law and encouraging moral corruption*





# Benjamin Disraeli

1804–81

Colourful, quotable and slightly disreputable, he was a rank outsider who successfully reinvented the Tory party for the democratic age

**L**ike another great reinventor of the Tories, Margaret Thatcher, Disraeli was an outsider. This was a party traditionally led by gentlemen with landed estates and titles, and who had attended a handful of elite schools. Disraeli was a novelist of Jewish descent, with a decent but patchy education and a slightly seedy reputation.

The oldest son of the scholarly Isaac D'Israeli was a spirited, conceited young man, given to loud clothes and reckless ventures in business and writing, and who lost huge sums of money which left him in debt for much of his life.

Disraeli rejected a legal career in favour of writing, though with little initial success. He famously travelled through Europe and on to Turkey and Egypt in 1830–31. Much is made of his 'gap year' visit to the Ottoman court and his fascination with its exotic and deadly political intrigue.

Accusations of cynicism, opportunism and lack of principle always followed Disraeli. It has been suggested that he chose a political career in the early 1830s because of the opportunities presented by the Reform Act crisis, and because of the fact that MPs couldn't be imprisoned for debt. The opportunism seemed confirmed as the young radical became a Tory and then made his name by turning on Tory leader Peel over Corn Law abolition.

"Conservative government is an organised hypocrisy," he said, aiming at Peel's supposed duplicity, though it was a phrase which many thought could equally apply to Disraeli.

Yet two of his best-known novels, *Coningsby* (1844) and *Sybil: or The Two Nations* (1845) from this period demonstrated both idealism and principle and the gestation of his ideas about 'one nation' Conservatism.

In 1868, Disraeli finally made it to the

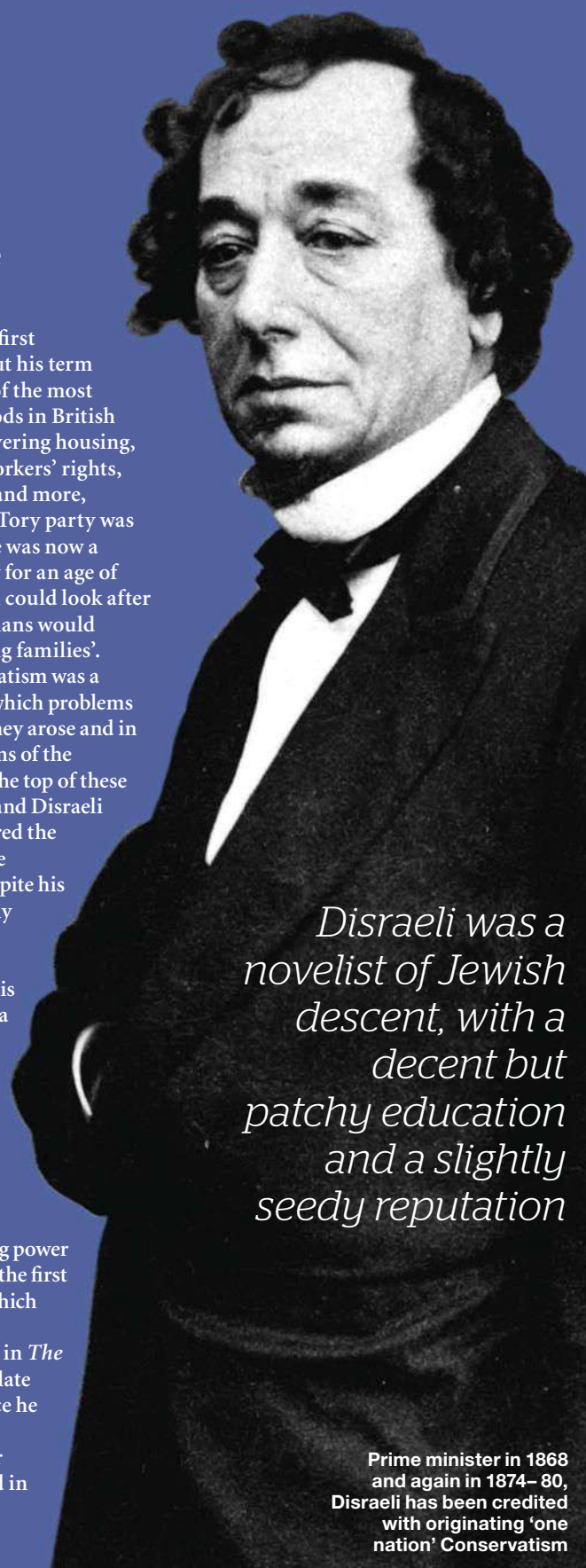
'top of the greasy pole'. His first ministry was short-lived, but his term from 1874 to 1880 was one of the most remarkable reforming periods in British history. There were bills covering housing, public health, education, workers' rights, reforms of the civil service and more, demonstrating that the old Tory party was gone for ever, and that there was now a modern Conservative party for an age of widening electorates, which could look after the interests of what politicians would nowadays call 'hard-working families'.

This 'one nation' Conservatism was a pragmatic half-ideology in which problems were dealt with only when they arose and in which the historic institutions of the country were protected. At the top of these institutions was the crown, and Disraeli famously courted and flattered the queen. (He also preferred the company of women and, despite his devotion to his wife, probably had several mistresses.)

Victoria sent a bouquet of primroses to his funeral – "his favourite flowers", inspiring a very influential legacy in the Primrose League. By 1891, the League had over a million members, enlisting the middle and working classes for the Conservative cause in the new age of a growing franchise. It was a counterweight to the growing power of the trade unions, and was the first ever political organisation which mobilised women.

After his death, an article in *The Times* said: "In the inarticulate mass of the English populace he discerned the Conservative workingman as the sculptor perceives the angel prisoned in a block of marble." **H**

Words: Eugene Byrne



*Disraeli was a novelist of Jewish descent, with a decent but patchy education and a slightly seedy reputation*

Prime minister in 1868 and again in 1874–80, Disraeli has been credited with originating 'one nation' Conservatism





# Victoria and

Charlotte Hodgman talks to **Kate Williams** about Queen Victoria and Prince Albert's romance, and visits eight places linked to the marriage that restored the monarchy's popularity

**T**he marriage of Victoria and Albert is probably one of history's most written-about royal romances. The focus of numerous films and books, Victoria and Albert are viewed by many historians as the royal couple who helped create the modern, more accessible monarchy we see today. But theirs was not always an easy partnership.

Albert, prince of the tiny, impoverished Saxon duchy of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, was Victoria's cousin and it was the dear wish of their mutual uncle, Leopold, king of the Belgians, and Victoria's own mother, the

Duchess of Kent, that the two would one day wed. However, the couple's first meeting – during celebrations for Victoria's 17th birthday – hardly suggested a match made in heaven: Albert found the social whirl of the British court exhausting and fell asleep during a ball, while Victoria found him rather dull.

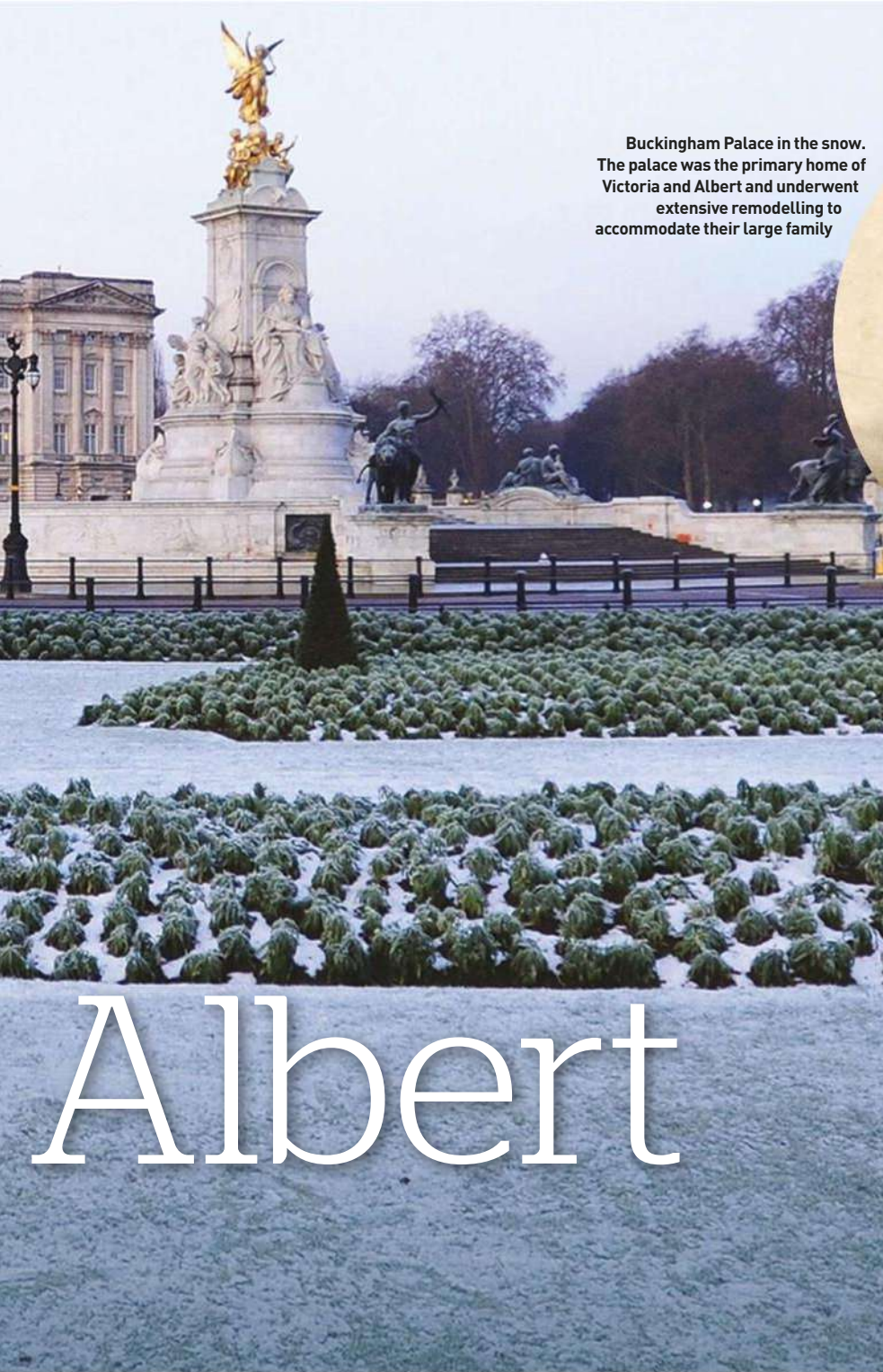
"Victoria and Albert's first meeting was not a great success," says Kate Williams, author of *Becoming Queen*, which tells the story of Victoria's troubled youth. "Victoria's mother and uncle in particular were keen on a match with Albert, but King William IV desired an alliance with the princes of Orange. Victoria, however, had other ideas." On her accession to the throne in 1837, an event that effectively

removed her from the clutches of her power-hungry mother, Victoria was in no hurry to marry, concerned lest her freedom be curtailed once more.

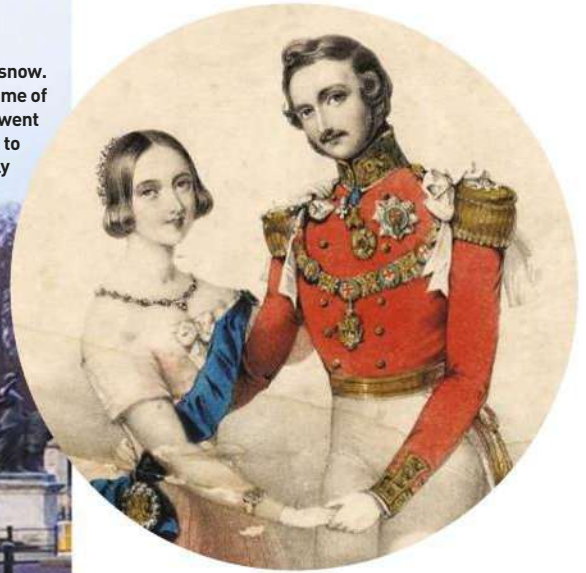
"I dreaded the thought of marrying," wrote Victoria in her diary. "I was so accustomed to having my own way that I thought it was 10 to 1 that I shouldn't agree with anybody." Yet, by the time Victoria was 20, she realised she had a choice: stay with her overbearing mother and Sir John Conroy, her mother's closest advisor, or find a husband. Marriage, it seemed, was by far the lesser of the two evils.

A second meeting between Albert and Victoria, at Windsor Castle on 10 October 1839, ensued – and this one proved far more





Buckingham Palace in the snow. The palace was the primary home of Victoria and Albert and underwent extensive remodelling to accommodate their large family



Victoria and Albert dance the polka, from the music cover for *The Queen and Prince Albert's Polka* by Louis Antoine Jullien, c1845

# Albert

successful. Despite a rough sea crossing, which had caused a rough sickness, Victoria immediately fell for the prince. Describing their meeting, the queen later wrote in her diary: "I stood on the stone steps and I beheld Albert, who was beautiful." Indeed, Leopold had done much to improve his nephew in the eyes of the young queen since their initial meeting three years earlier: Albert had been to university and had travelled extensively. Significantly, he'd been to Italy, a country Victoria had always longed to visit.

"Victoria was entranced," says Williams, "and five days later, as was the custom for monarchs (who could not receive proposals) Victoria offered marriage to Albert." The pair

were married on 10 February 1840. "Victoria's wedding was a much more public affair in comparison with previous royal nuptials, and was designed to secure the nation's affections," says Williams. "She planned a daytime rather than an evening ceremony as she wished the people to see her driving to St James's palace, where the ceremony took place. Rather than court dress, she wore white to accentuate her innocence and virginity. The public, who were tired of the excesses of previous monarchs, were delighted by her eagerness to share the ceremony and she set a trend for 'white weddings' that we still see today."

Despite widespread excitement for the wedding, Albert was not a popular choice of

husband. Many resented his foreign roots, while others were disappointed that he brought no wealth. One rhyme circulating at the time ran: "He comes to take 'for better or for worse', England's fat queen and England's fatter purse."

Says Kate Williams: "For Albert, marriage to Victoria was not at all what he had expected when Victoria had proposed. Pushed by Leopold to seize power for himself, Albert demanded a large yearly allowance and a peerage. Both were refused by parliament, who did not wish to have the prince meddling in politics, and Victoria herself refused Albert's request to appoint Germans to his household."

Albert's frustration at his lack of power was at the root of many of the arguments between the royal couple, but Victoria was determined to rule and firmly believed she was the only one who could do so. Albert, on the other hand, could only establish himself as head of his family of nine children and never became the king he had believed he would one day become.

"Victoria and Albert's emphasis on family life was crucial to the success of her reign," says Williams. "Having witnessed first-hand the excess and grandeur of monarchs such as George IV and the way that they had been caricatured and ridiculed by the public, Victoria set about creating her own domestic version of royalty, centred around the notion of a bourgeois family."

"Queen Victoria knew that she had to earn the respect and love of her people, and her portrayal of the royal family as a typical, albeit very wealthy, bourgeois family – without pomp or circumstance – meant that the public could relate to her, and they adored her for it. It is for this, as much as for her longevity, that she is remembered."

Turn the page to explore eight places linked with the lives of Victoria and Albert







**1 Kensington Palace, London**

**2 Beaumaris Castle, Beaumaris, Isle of Anglesey**

**3 Windsor Castle, Windsor, Berkshire**

**4 Buckingham Palace, London**

**5 Chatsworth House, Bakewell, Derbyshire**

**6 Osborne House, East Cowes, Isle of Wight**

**7 Balmoral Castle, Royal Deeside, Aberdeenshire**

**8 Albert Memorial, Kensington Gardens, London**

## **1 Kensington Palace, LONDON**

Where Victoria spent an unhappy childhood

Victoria was born on 24 May 1819, the only child of Edward, fourth son of George III, and the German-born Princess Victoria of Saxe-Coburg-Saalfeld. Edward died within months of his daughter's birth, leaving his family impoverished, and Victoria was raised under the strict guidance of her mother and Sir John Conroy, once her father's equerry. Childhood was not a happy time for Victoria. Her mother was obsessed by power and money, both of which, it was deemed, could be achieved by Victoria's accession to the throne.

Living with her mother and Conroy at Kensington Palace, Victoria was placed on the 'Kensington system', living under a set of rules designed by her mother to gain power over her daughter. Victoria was watched 24 hours a day and followed a

strict timetable, sleeping in her mother's room, with few friends and no freedom.

At age 12, Victoria became heir to the throne and six years later, in the early hours of 20 June 1837, the archbishop of Canterbury visited Victoria at Kensington Palace to inform her that William IV had died and she was queen. The king's demise was a turning point for Victoria and she was finally able to make her own decisions, immediately requesting her own room and an hour to herself – something she had never had – and refusing to see either her mother or Conroy.

☎ 0844 482 7799

▶ [www.hrp.org.uk/KensingtonPalace](http://www.hrp.org.uk/KensingtonPalace)



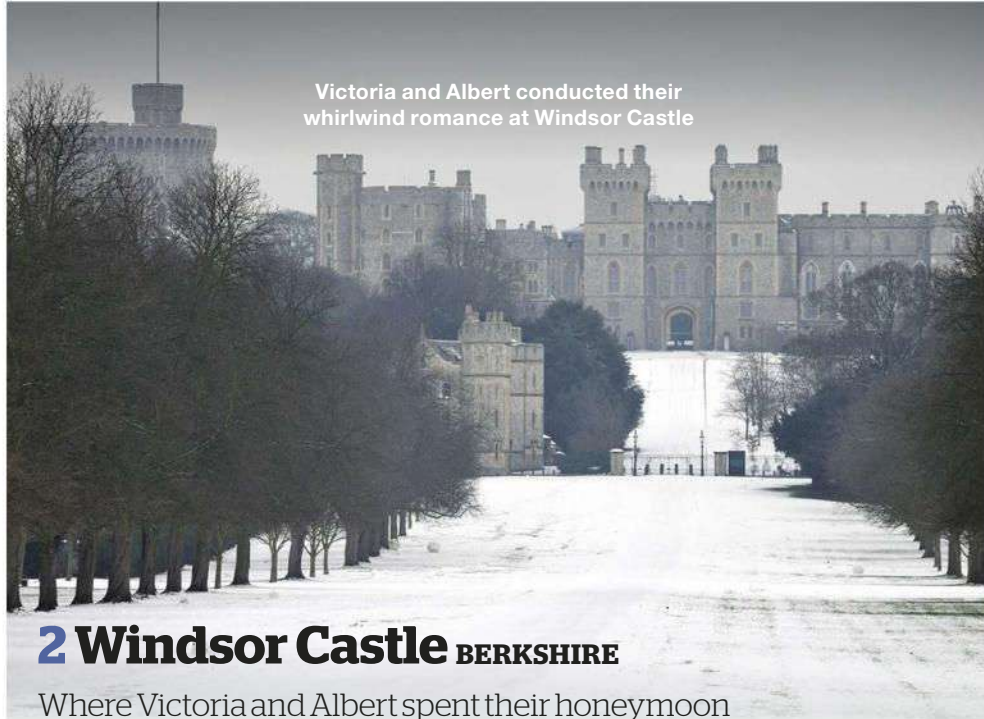
**Kensington Palace,**  
where Victoria's freedom  
was severely curtailed

The 13th-century  
Beaumaris Castle, the  
largest of Edward I's  
Welsh fortifications





Victoria and Albert conducted their whirlwind romance at Windsor Castle



## 2 Windsor Castle BERKSHIRE

Where Victoria and Albert spent their honeymoon

Windsor Castle is the largest and oldest occupied castle in the world, and has seen many royal residents in its 900-year history. Covering an area of some 26 acres, the castle is still an official royal residence of Her Majesty the Queen, and was also the location for much of the royal entertainment of Queen Victoria's reign.

Albert and Victoria conducted their whirlwind romance at Windsor Castle following their second meeting in October 1839, and it was here that they spent a short but happy honeymoon after their wedding. On their wed-

ding night, overwhelmed by the day, Victoria retired with a headache, Albert by her side. She wrote later in her diary: "His excessive love and happiness I could never have hoped to have felt before."

Says Williams: "Albert desired a honeymoon of some five or six weeks, wishing to have his wife to himself for a while, but Victoria's many duties as sovereign meant that she was only able to spare three days. But even in this short time Victoria was unable to escape her royal obligations and, much to Albert's dismay, was constantly interrupted by

visitors and entertaining in the evenings."

Despite this, Windsor is inextricably linked with the couple's relationship – it was the place that they met, where they spent much of their married life, and also where Albert died in 1861. Following his death, Victoria kept Albert's rooms at Windsor exactly as they had been when he breathed his last, even sending hot water and towels every morning for shaving. Albert is buried in the Royal Mausoleum built nearby at Frogmore.

☎ 0303 123 7304

► [www.royalcollection.org.uk](http://www.royalcollection.org.uk)

## 3 Beaumaris Castle ISLE OF ANGLESEY

Where Victoria began to secure the loyalty of her future subjects

Begun in 1295, Beaumaris Castle was the last castle built by King Edward I in Wales, but, despite its vast size, was never completed. It was here that the 13-year-old Victoria, then Princess of Wales, and her mother visited in August 1832, during a tour of England and Wales. A Royal Eisteddfod – a Welsh festival of literature, music and performance – was held at the castle in Victoria's honour, despite an outbreak of cholera in the town.

Royal tours were a means of securing the loyalty of the nation and Victoria continued to make them even after she became queen. The Duchess of Kent, determined that her daughter would one day rule, took Victoria on a number of these trips.

"King William IV was furious that Victoria was being taken on tour and flaunted so openly as heir to the throne," says Williams. "But the people greeted Victoria with great excitement, often unharnessing the horses from her coach and dragging it themselves."

Although Victoria loved Anglesey, she also saw poverty there and later, as queen, made a point of supporting those who engaged in charitable endeavours towards the poor, such as Florence Nightingale. Beaumaris Castle, regarded by many as the finest of all the Edwardian castles in Wales, is open to the public.

☎ 01248 810361

► [www.cadw.gov.wales/daysout/beaumaris-castle](http://www.cadw.gov.wales/daysout/beaumaris-castle)

## 4 Buckingham Palace, LONDON

Where Albert tried to stamp his authority

The front gate of Buckingham Palace, the principal home of the royal family since 1837



Queen Victoria was the first monarch to live in the Buckingham Palace we know today. George III originally bought the property, then Buckingham House, in 1761 as a family home, and in 1762 began work on remodeling the building. However, he died before the palace was complete and it was Victoria who set up residence there in July 1837, three weeks after her accession. Albert and Victoria were never as happy at Buckingham Palace as they were in other royal residences. Extensive renovation was required to provide for their fast-growing family, a project that included moving the Marble Arch to its present location in the north-east corner of Hyde Park.

"Albert tried in vain to carve out a role for himself in the royal household at Buckingham Palace," comments Williams. "He promoted himself as the saviour of the royal finances and attempted to make the household run more efficiently. He was fighting a losing battle, though, and was really only successful in retiring Victoria's elderly governess, a woman he detested."

It is at Buckingham Palace, though, that we see some of Albert's artistic influence on Victoria. The German artist Franz Xaver Winterhalter became royal painter through Albert, and was responsible for painting the royal family in more approachable, less formal settings. The composer Mendelssohn also became a friend of the royal family and helped popularise German music in Britain.

☎ 0303 1237334

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## 5 Chatsworth House BAKEWELL, DERBYSHIRE

Where Victoria demonstrated her Whig allegiance

Victoria's political beliefs differed greatly to those of her predecessors and she remained a Whig supporter her whole life. "Traditionally, the more conservative Tory party was the party of the aristocracy and royalty," says Williams. "Victoria's support of the Whigs – one of the two English politi-

cal parties of the day – was a huge break from tradition, particularly after the Reform Act of 1832, which expanded the country's electorate to men of property. This meant that it was no longer just the aristocracy who could vote, something the liberal Whigs had long campaigned for."

Victoria's political allegiances caused ructions early in her reign, particularly during the episode that became known as the 'Bedchamber Affair'. Victoria refused to replace her Whig ladies-in-waiting with the wives of Tory MPs or peers following the failure of Lord Melbourne's Whig government in 1839. The new Tory government was unable to form and Melbourne resumed his position. In a note to Melbourne, Victoria wrote triumphantly: "They [the Tories] wanted to deprive me of my Ladies, and I suppose they would deprive me next of my dressers and my housemaids; they wished to treat me like a girl, but I will show them that I am Queen of England."

Victoria had an intense dislike for the Tory party – blaming it for the fact that Albert was not granted the money and the peerage he had requested at their engagement – and tried hard not to invite any Tories to the wedding.

Chatsworth House was home to the 6th Duke of Devonshire, one of the leading Whigs of the day. Victoria visited the house twice: once as a child with her mother in 1832; and, openly demonstrating her political views, the second time with Albert in 1843. The trees planted by Victoria and her mother on their visit can still be seen under the terrace.

☎ 01246 565300  
▶ [www.chatsworth.org](http://www.chatsworth.org)

**The ceiling of the painted hall of Chatsworth House depicts scenes from the life of Julius Caesar**



## 6 Osborne EAST COWES, ISLE OF WIGHT

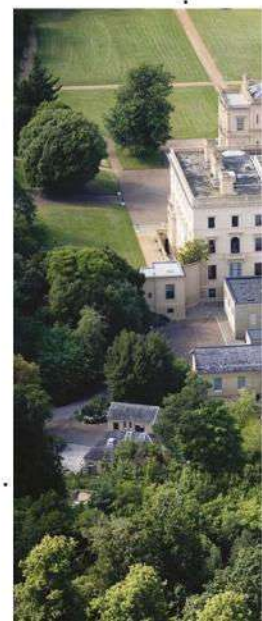
Where the royal couple created a family home

Queen Victoria fell pregnant with her first child, also named Victoria, soon after the wedding – and, from that moment, the royal family grew rapidly. Within three months of the birth, Victoria was pregnant again, this time with Prince Albert Edward, later Edward VII – the first legitimate male heir to be born to a British monarch in 80 years. The royal couple eventually had nine children but felt that the royal palaces were not suitable for their growing brood. To that end they bought Osborne House on the Isle of Wight, an area Victoria loved as a child.

Purchased in 1845, Osborne House was the family home that Albert and Victoria longed for, and much alteration was performed, including the addition of a pair of Italianate towers overlooking the Solent, a view said to have reminded Albert of the Bay of Naples in Italy. Says Williams: "Osborne was a house that Albert could be master in and exert the control that he lacked in other areas. He was heavily involved in much of the building's design, including the Italian formal gardens that can still be seen by visitors to the property today."

A two-storey children's cottage, built in the grounds in 1853 and affectionately named the 'Swiss Cottage', was designed by the couple as an educational tool for their offspring. Here the girls learned how to cook and perform domestic chores, while the boys were instructed in gardening and carpentry in the adjoining Swiss garden. A miniature mock fortress, including cannons and drawbridge, completed the children's play area.

☎ 01983 200022  
▶ [www.english-heritage.org.uk](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk)







Balmoral Castle is still a favourite holiday home of the royal family

## 7 Balmoral Castle

ABERDEENSHIRE

Where the couple embraced the Scottish landscape

Like Osborne, Balmoral was somewhere the royal couple could spend family time in a less formal environment than Buckingham Palace. Described by Victoria as “My dear paradise in the Highlands”, it was purchased in 1848 and has been the Scottish home of the royals ever since.

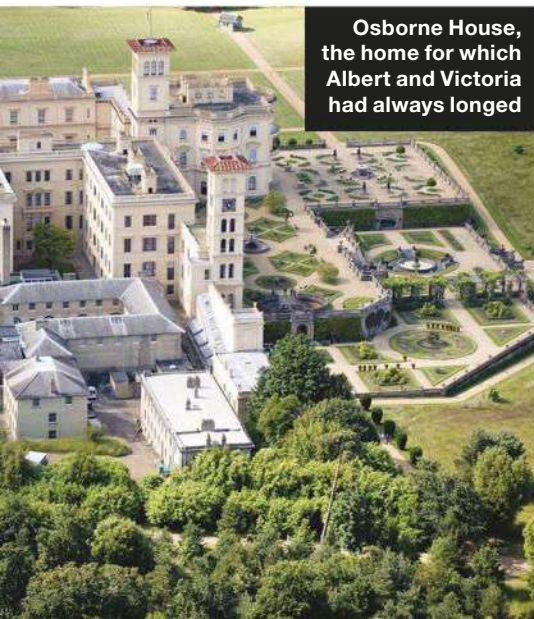
Says Williams: “Both Victoria and Albert were incredibly fond of Scotland and the pair rejoiced in the scenery and cold weather. For Albert, the rolling hills of Scotland reminded him of his home country, and it was because of this that Victoria spent so much of her time at the house following Albert’s death. “The court was not so enamoured with Scotland, though, and the queen’s ladies moaned constantly about the Scottish weather and love of porridge!”

It was at Balmoral that the queen first met John Brown, the servant on whom she relied so heavily after Albert’s death and whose relationship with the queen has been scrutinised by historians. But, just as Victoria had loathed her mother’s companion, John Conroy, so her children hated John Brown, and Edward VII destroyed many of Victoria’s memorials to him after her death.

☎ 01339 742534

► [www.balmoralcastle.com](http://www.balmoralcastle.com)

**Osborne House, the home for which Albert and Victoria had always longed**



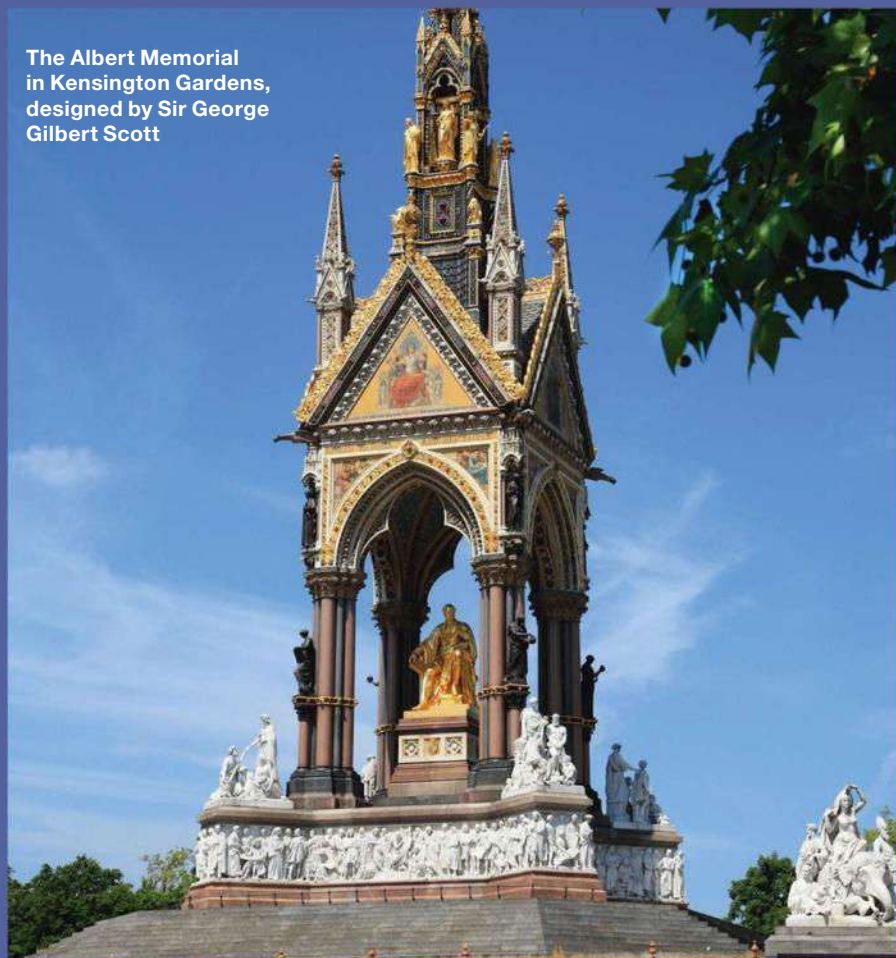
PRESS ASSOCIATION/NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY/GETTY

## 8 Albert Memorial

KENSINGTON GARDENS, LONDON

Where a public symbol of Victoria’s grief can be seen

The Albert Memorial in Kensington Gardens, designed by Sir George Gilbert Scott



Victoria’s grief following the death of Albert on 14 December 1861 was profound. Albert had never been a healthy man, but his death at the age of 42 came as a shock to Victoria and the nation, and was a blow from which the queen never really recovered.

“The Victorians were great mourners,” says Williams, “and Victoria’s grief was unrelenting. She dressed head to toe in black and retreated more and more from public appearances. She was unable even to attend the wedding of her son, the future Edward VII, sitting instead in the closet of St James’s chapel weeping throughout the ceremony.” There was also a national outpouring of grief for the prince consort, and Albert became more popular in death than he had ever been when he was alive.

Despite Albert’s request to the contrary, Victoria ordered that memorials be erected in his memory, perhaps none so spectacular as the 54-metre-high

Albert Memorial in Kensington Gardens, completed in 1875. The monument itself was designed as a celebration of Victorian achievement and Albert’s passions and interests. Marble figures representing Europe, Asia, Africa and America stand at each corner of the memorial, while figures symbolising manufacture, commerce, agriculture and engineering can be found higher up. Around the base of the memorial the Parnassus frieze depicts celebrated painters, poets, sculptors, musicians and architects, reflecting Albert’s passion for the arts. The area around the Albert Memorial, centred around South Kensington, Kensington and Chelsea, is popularly known as Albertopolis due to the number of buildings, monuments and road names dedicated to the prince consort. **H**

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► [www.royalparks.org.uk](http://www.royalparks.org.uk)



# FROM THE CRADLE

## ◆ **Victorian working life**

Was existence really so grim for the poor?

## ◆ **Living in sin**

Morality and marriage

## ◆ **Crime scandals**

The Victorian fascination with murder

## ◆ **Man about the house**

Decorating the middle-class home

## ◆ **Policing the slums**

Keeping order in London's poor streets

## ◆ **Nursing by numbers**

Florence Nightingale's love of statistics

## ◆ **A grave dilemma**

Solving the 19th-century cemetery crisis






# TO THE GRAVE





# Was re

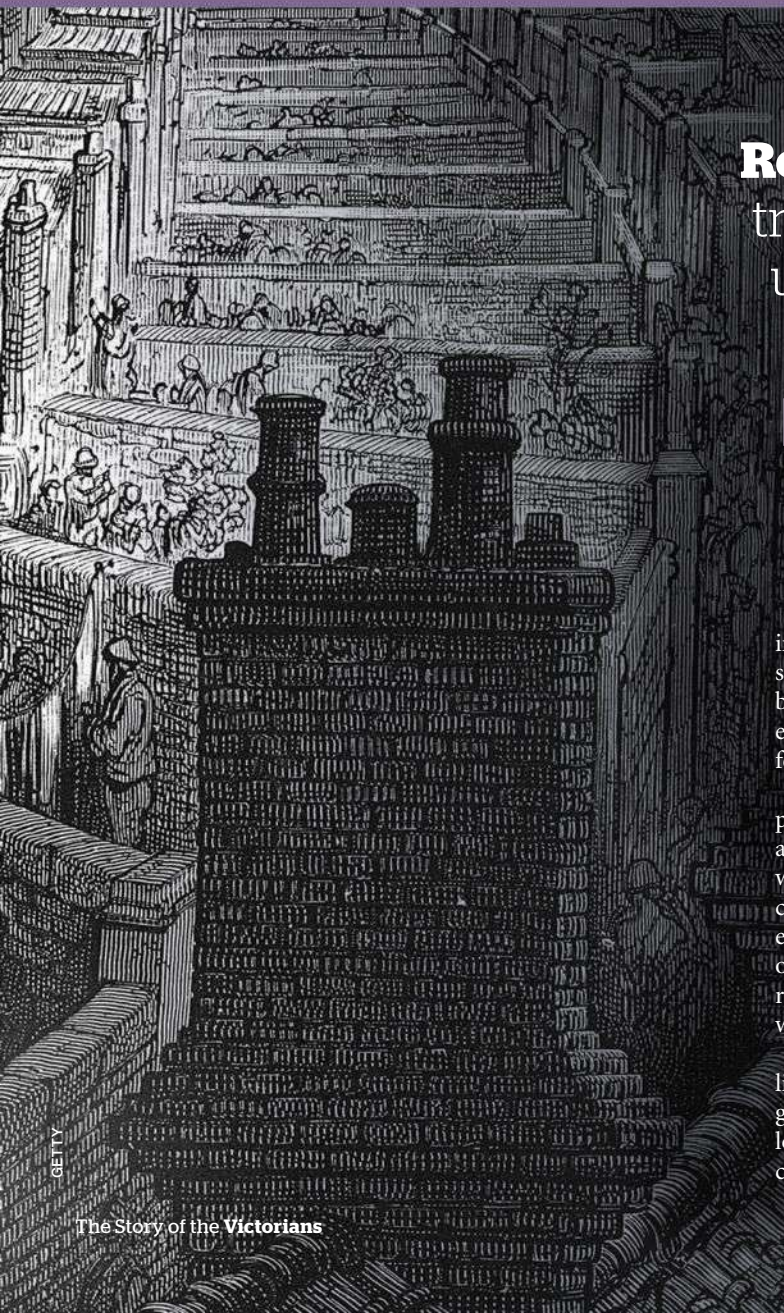
A detailed black and white engraving by Gustave Doré showing a dense, multi-story terraced housing complex in Victorian London. The view is from an elevated position looking down into a narrow courtyard. Numerous tall, brick chimneys rise from the rooftops, and many windows are visible, some with laundry hanging outside. In the courtyard below, several people are engaged in daily activities: one person is washing clothes in a large tub, others are standing or walking. Large wooden barrels are placed in the courtyard. The overall impression is one of extreme overcrowding and urban squalor.

Gustave Doré's famous engraving, produced to illustrate the 1872 book *London: A Pilgrimage*, depicts (and exaggerates) the squalor of tightly packed terraced houses. Yet, as Rosalind Crone observes, the washing lines in Doré's picture demonstrate that "slum-dwellers were not all very dirty – or, at least, they didn't choose to be"





# Victorian life ally so grim?



**Rosalind Crone** reveals surprising truths about the experiences of the urban poor in 19th-century Britain

**T**he most familiar images of Victorian life are bleak indeed: impoverished children working long hours in factories and mines; blankets of smog suspended above overcrowded cities; frightening workhouses run by cruel governors; violent criminals lurking in the shadows. In black-and-white photos of the period, people both high and low-born are invariably unsmiling – a miserable bunch, surely?

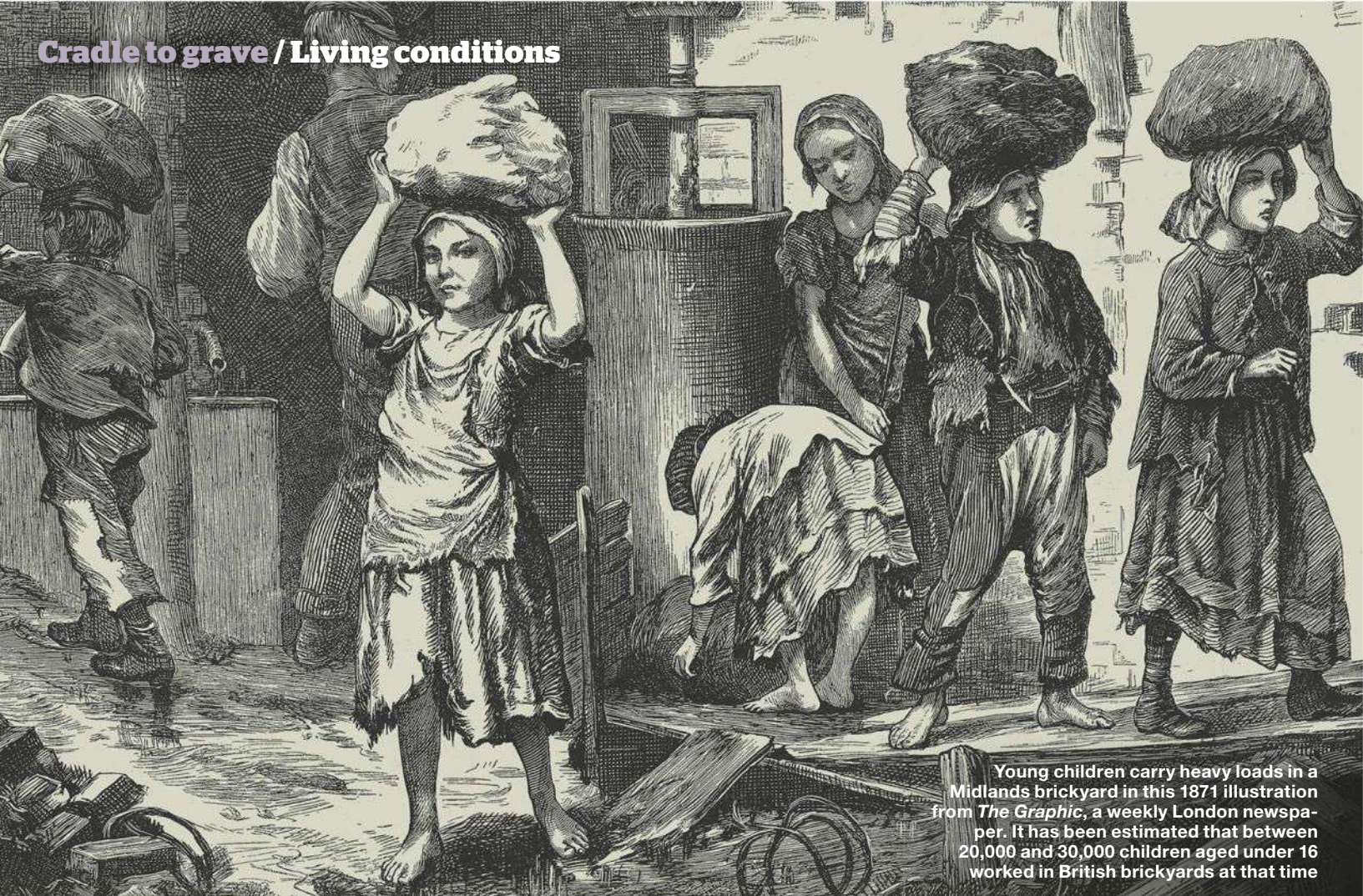
There is some truth in this portrayal. The twin processes of industrialisation and urbanisation did force a drop in living standards for some, and the turbulent decade after Queen Victoria came to the throne became known as the 'Hungry Forties'. These years were punctuated by economic depression leading to social unrest, popular protests and growing fears of revolution.

Such impressions can be explained by the collision of three unique processes. The first, combining industrialisation and urbanisation, had acutely visual effects. Just as important was the expansion of print culture, which provided a vehicle for such images, as well as a growing and captivated audience. The third ingredient, equally crucial, was the emergence of a reforming spirit among the social elite from the 1830s onwards. Grave images of deprivation were circulated precisely because reformers such as Dickens, Disraeli and Gaskell, plus journalists and MPs, wanted to remedy such social problems.

But was life truly miserable? Did the labouring poor believe they were living in exceptionally tough times? Social historians have worked hard to give voice to those at the bottom, uncovering new evidence and taking a fresh look at old material related to five aspects of life. In doing so, they have challenged the very grimmest portrayals of urban Victorian Britain.







Young children carry heavy loads in a Midlands brickyard in this 1871 illustration from *The Graphic*, a weekly London newspaper. It has been estimated that between 20,000 and 30,000 children aged under 16 worked in British brickyards at that time



## 1 Were the mills really dark and satanic?

Workers toiled in dangerous factories or mines – but conditions improved substantially

The mention of work in the Victorian period rarely fails to conjure up an image of an imposing factory or a bleak mine, run by a merciless employer, in which employees – including small children – are forced to work long hours, often in poor light, using dangerous machinery. It is a picture created by novels such as Dickens's *Hard Times*, by government inquiries, such as Ashley's Mines Commission of 1842, which exposed brutal physical and moral conditions, and by scandals about real factories throughout the century. But is it accurate? Not entirely.

Industrialisation in the early 19th century did drive down wages and lead to an increase in the employment of women and children, especially those of a very young age, in the manufacturing sector. Work in factories and mines certainly could be dangerous. In 1879, one MP who had visited a Bradford textile factory in the late 1830s described the 80 crippled and deformed children gathered for his inspection in the courtyard: "No power of language could describe the varieties, and I may say the cruelties, in these degradations of the human form. They stood or squatted before me in all the shapes of the letters of the alphabet."

However, from the 1830s onwards, legislation was introduced to restrict child and (in some cases) female labour, to improve conditions and to regulate working hours. Reforms were limited, but often by the realities of working-class life. Take child labour, for example. While it offends our 21st-century sensibilities, it was not necessarily socially detrimental – after all, the wages that

children brought in could raise the standard of living for the entire family. The alternative – schooling – cost money and rarely bettered a child's future prospects.

What's more, working in a factory could be preferable to other types of paid work. Days were controlled by the clock, but they were not necessarily longer than those of agricultural labourers. Clocking in and out, combined with the physical separation of work and home, could be more attractive than the endless days of domestic servants – another expanding industry. For every merciless master there existed at least one paternalistic employer who cared about his workers. Some even created model villages near workplaces for families to live in some comfort, one of the most famous being the Cadbury's Bournville establishment near Birmingham.

Not only did some workers enjoy protection for traditional holidays (raucous St Monday festivities continued as late as the 1870s in the West Midlands), but time for leisure increased: the working day was limited to 10 hours, and the Saturday half-day was introduced. Many employers organised trips for their workforces to the seaside.

Even employees without these privileges were increasingly able to enjoy an expanding world of leisure, as workers' real wages increased from the middle of the century. At the same time, industrial unrest and popular narratives of factory accidents subsided because the majority of working people became more comfortable with new patterns of work and industrial capitalism.





## 2 *A route out of poverty*

Not all paupers were condemned to hellish workhouses

One of the most enduring images of the Victorian period is entirely fictional: the painfully hungry Oliver Twist begging the tyrannical workhouse beadle, Mr Bumble, for gruel. Charles Dickens wrote his novel in the wake of the New Poor Law of 1834, legislation that aimed to reduce government spending on welfare by deterring the poor from seeking assistance. Local relieving officers were tasked to send those in need to the workhouse, where families were split up. Those who could work were pressed into hard labour and those who couldn't were cared for at the minimum standard. All were subjected to a harsh disciplinary regime.

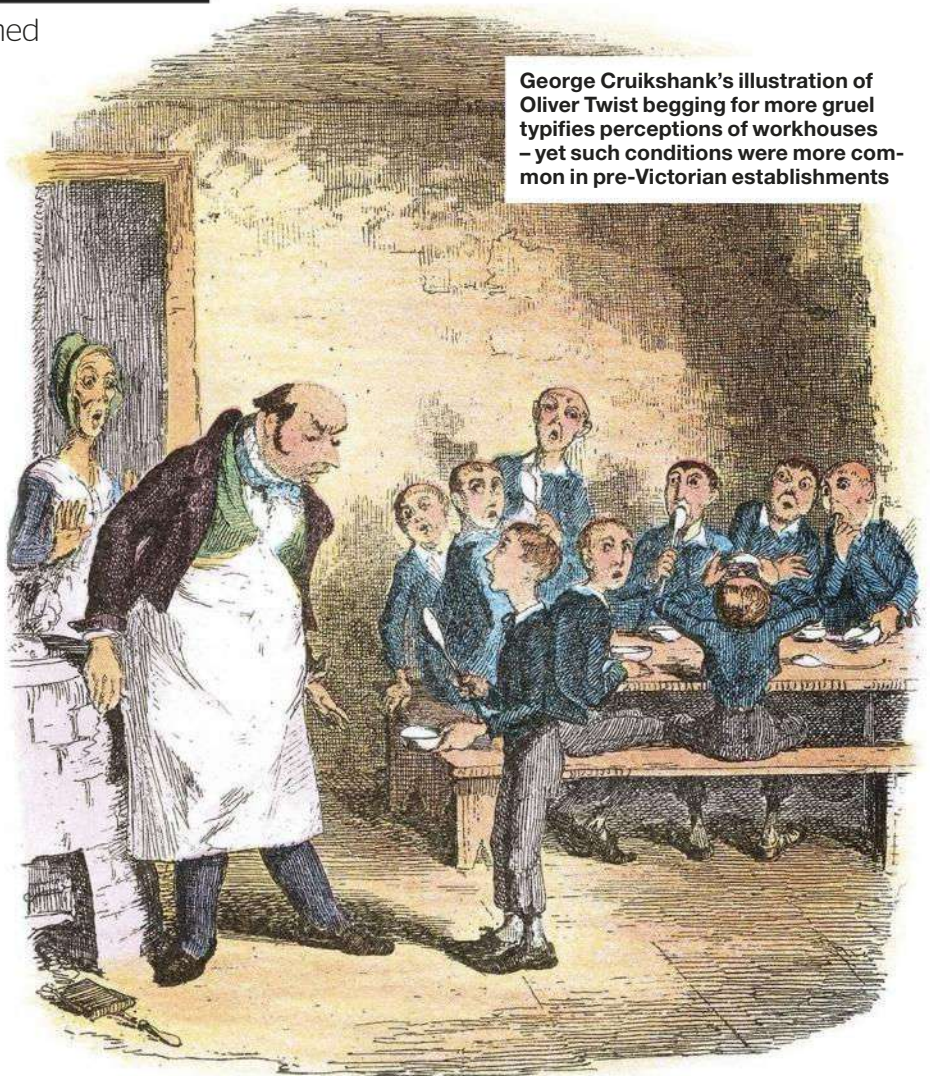
Some workhouses *were* abhorrent institutions. Local penal authorities were convinced that paupers deliberately tore their uniforms or smashed windows in order to be sent to prison – where both accommodation and food were better.

The workhouse also held a special attraction to journalists eager for explosive copy. In 1866, James Greenwood disguised himself as a vagrant to spend a night in the male 'casual ward' of the Lambeth Workhouse. After being registered, he was forced to bathe in a "liquid so disgustingly like weak mutton broth" and allocated a shirt and rug, then entered the ward to find "30 men and boys stretched upon shallow pallets which put only six inches of comfortable hay between them and the stony floor. These beds were placed close together... In not a few cases two gentlemen had clubbed beds and rugs and slept together."

But how helpful are such portraits in understanding the experience of poverty in Victorian Britain? They certainly have their limits. Written between 1837 and 1839, *Oliver Twist* could at best describe conditions only in pre-Victorian poorhouses, and the New Poor Law was in practice not nearly as harsh as its promise – probably why campaigns against it died away fairly quickly.

It's also worth acknowledging that workhouses functioned as providers of services ranging from education to health care, particularly from the mid-1860s onwards when improvements in provision were made.

What's more, poverty was not a permanent state but often a condition that working people, or even lower middle-class people, could slip into and out of, depending on



George Cruikshank's illustration of *Oliver Twist* begging for more gruel typifies perceptions of workhouses – yet such conditions were more common in pre-Victorian establishments

circumstances. And the poor had multiple resources upon which to draw. First was charity, which many socially conscious and religiously motivated elites were only too eager to supply. And the poor were not docile recipients of this charity. They knew just how to play the role required to secure funds – combining a display of respectability with evidence of poverty.

Secondary survival strategies ranged from gleaning (gathering leftover grain after harvest), keeping livestock, co-residence and pawning, to less legitimate activities – poaching, petty crime, prostitution and fraud. The poor routinely pawned their Sunday clothes early in the week to put food on the table, and redeemed them on Saturdays after wages had been collected. A London pawnshop assistant described the merriment of the trade on Saturday evening: "Some was eating fish and chips, some was eating tangerines, some had pease pudding and faggots. Cor blimey it was like Mother Kelly's doorstep in there."

*Poverty was not a permanent state but often a condition that working people could slip into and out of*





Jacob's Island, a notorious slum 'rookery' in south London, portrayed around 1810



### 3 The war on dirt

How the Victorians combated the blight of the urban slum

Urbanisation and industrialisation worsened living conditions for town dwellers. New industries pumped pollutants into the air and water. Expanding populations increased pressure on existing sewerage. Overcrowded neighbourhoods deteriorated into slums. The most notorious – St Giles, Old Nichol and Jacob's Island in London, Angel Meadow in Manchester – were immortalised by artists, journalists and novelists, and some even featured in Baedeker's famous travel guides.

The need to address such problems was recognised at the start of the Victorian period. To the investigations of reformer Edwin Chadwick must be added protestations from residents of ground-floor and cellar apartments inundated by sewerage overflows during heavy rain. Those living beside urban burial grounds witnessed daily the turning out of recently interred bodies to accommodate the stream of fresh corpses, as described by Thomas Munns in 1842: "I saw them bring up intestines in a bucket and put them out on the earth, and bones were thrown up, which were put in a barrow and wheeled away."

Improvements came quickly. From the 1840s, new drain systems and other ambitious projects started to remove waste and clean up water supplies. Scavengers removed filth from the streets. New laws imposed regulations on construction of dwellings to combat the growth of slums. Some towns built public conveniences; by 1875, Glasgow had 198 urinals.

Notably, 80 to 90 per cent of the population did not reside in slums, and many working-class families, especially in the later Victorian period, did not live in overcrowded conditions. And what seriously needs reassessing is the assumption of dirt. By contemporary standards, slum-dwellers were not all very dirty – or, at least, they didn't choose to be. Evidence lurks in depictions of slum life. Gustave Doré's famous etching (on page 46) shows lines of washing hanging in tenement backyards. Some even served as laundries for the well-to-do – those most offended by the slums' dirty existence.



### 4 When crime paid

Newspapers made a mint out of exaggerating the threat posed by 'the criminal class'

Although the Victorian age has come to be remembered as criminal and violent, most of our perceptions have been driven by the Victorians' own fears and claims of a large, hardened, uncivilised and largely irretrievable criminal class in towns and cities.

The famous early Victorian social investigators Henry Mayhew and John Binny boasted that they had managed to assemble 150 of these creatures in a room, the effect being a "spectacle of squalor, rags and wretchedness. Some were young men, and some were children... [many] had the deep-sunk and half-averted eye... so characteristic of natural dishonesty and cunning... The hair of most of the lads was cut very close to the head, showing their recent liberation from prison."

The popularisation of phrenology (a pseudoscience primarily focused on measurements of the human skull) gave the idea of the 'criminal class' a scientific authority. The arrival of crime statistics in 1857 brought accurate estimates of the dimensions of this class (20,000 members in London alone, according to journalist James Greenwood in 1869), and the introduction of criminal registers with photographs enabled the monitoring of every individual.

Historians have worked hard to explode this myth: there were probably no more than about 4,000 truly 'habitual criminals', and most theft and violence was opportunistic and carried out by poor, young men.

Contemporary fears about crime and violence were further inflamed by an expanding and increasingly pictorial newspaper

press. Crime news was readily available and sold well. Detailed coverage of a particularly gruesome murder could increase circulation several fold; the proprietors of several national and London newspapers made small fortunes from coverage of the 'Jack the Ripper' murders.

With its thirst for crime, the media also manufactured moral panics by compiling reports over several weeks to suggest that a crime wave had hit a local area. The most famous of these was the London garrotting panic of the early 1860s, sparked when several London newspapers published a wave of reports on violent street robberies. In fact, according to the criminal statistics, there was no significant increase in robberies. However, popular fears forced the government to take action, increasing penalties for offenders and granting police new powers of surveillance over known criminals.

Victorian statistics also tell us that crime – or at least serious theft and violence – was in decline through the second half of the 19th century. They are supported by other evidence, notably the emergence of a disciplined, efficient police force, accepted – if not always liked – by almost every level of society.

At the same time, society was becoming less violent. Male-on-male violence almost certainly declined as displays of aggression were increasingly regarded as unacceptable.

But that didn't stop many Victorians believing that they were living through a crime-ravaged age. As one committed working-class newspaper reader declared to Henry Mayhew: "I read *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper* on a Sunday, and what murders and robberies there is now!"

Perceptions are important in assessments of quality of life, but so too is lived experience. Victorians were predominantly spectators rather than victims of crime. And spectating – when violence was presented in neatly packaged, entertaining forms – could be an enjoyable pastime.

*Fears about crime were inflamed by an expanding and increasingly pictorial press*



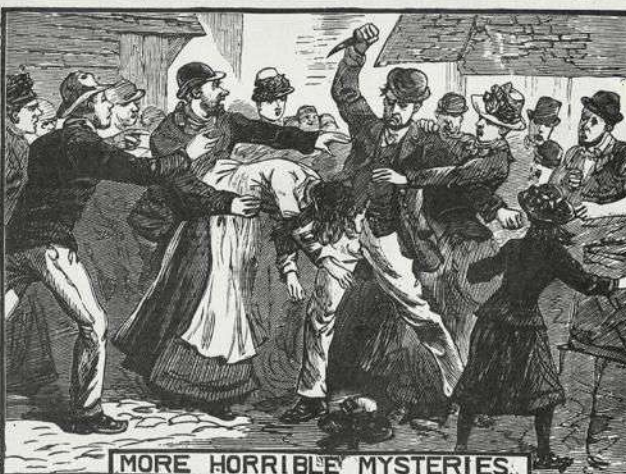
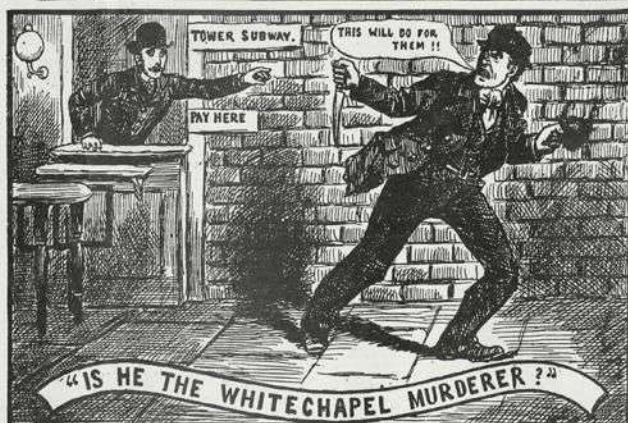
# POLICE THE ILLUSTRATED NEWS

LAW COURTS AND WEEKLY RECORD

No. 1,284.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 1888.

Price One Penny.



The front page of the 22 September 1888 edition of *The Illustrated Police News* reports the murder of Annie Chapman, second victim of the killer dubbed Jack the Ripper. Such lurid accounts of crimes boosted newspaper circulations enormously





## 5 A nation rises from its sickbed

Scientists took the fight to killer diseases, with impressive results

The Victorians, especially poor ones, were at high risk of catching some nasty diseases. Most of the common killers – measles, scarlet fever, smallpox and typhus – had blighted Britain for centuries. Yet overcrowded and unsanitary conditions created by rapid urbanisation did assist the spread of these infectious diseases, as well as various illnesses of the digestive system such as diarrhoea and gastroenteritis.

What's more, life expectancy, which had previously shown long-term improvement, took a tumble in the second quarter of the 19th century. By the start of Queen Victoria's reign, it had fallen to around 25–27 years in the industrial towns of Manchester, Liverpool and Glasgow. As the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure calculates, life expectancy in urban slums of the 1830s and 1840s was the lowest it had been since the Black Death.

The primary reason was the high rate of child mortality. Around one-third of children, and more than half in some poor neighbourhoods, died before they reached the age of five. High child mortality was a factor driving increased numbers of offspring. However, as the letters, diaries and memoirs of men and women from all levels of society show, having more children never compensated emotionally for those who were lost.

As grim as these mortality statistics appear, overall the Victorian period was an era of improvement in terms of health. Life expectancy increased from around 1870 onwards, largely due to the fact that the Victorians became better at fighting diseases. Sanitary reform helped because stagnant dirty water was flushed away. Doctors and scientists began to develop a better understanding of the causes of diseases.

Though cholera killed more than 50,000 people in Britain during the 1848–49 epidemic, the death toll fell to around 14,000 in the last epidemic of 1866, after John Snow successfully demonstrated that the disease was transmitted via contaminated water. Infectious diseases were responsible for around 40 per cent of urban deaths in 1840, but this figure dropped to about 20 per cent by 1900. The moment at which the prevalence of degenerative disease overtook that of infectious disease came during the Victorian era.

Alongside better hygiene, improved nutrition also helped combat disease, which might sound unlikely in light of a commonly told story of the period – the numbers of



A cartoon from 1849 plays on the link between cholera and contaminated water posited by John Snow – a breakthrough that saved many lives

short men with bad teeth and poor eyesight, enlisting for service in the Boer Wars at the end of the century, who triggered a government inquiry.

Then there were tales of food adulteration – the use of chalk or alum in white bread, plaster of Paris in boiled sweets, horsemeat in sausages – encouraged by an unregulated industry under pressure to sell ready-made food at cheap prices. However, from 1860, new legislation on food standards combated the worst abuses. And anyway, having developed a taste for many 'rogue' products, the working classes were largely indifferent about most low-level adulteration.

Recent research suggests that Britons of the mid-Victorian period enjoyed a diet rich in fruit, whole grains, oily fish and vegetables – superior to ours today, in fact. Nutritional problems came in the form of tinned foods and cheap sugar imported during the late 19th century – detrimental in the long term but, in the short term, sources of delight rather than misery. **H**

Rosalind Crone is a senior lecturer in history at the Open University, specialising in the society and culture of 19th-century Britain, particularly criminal justice and popular culture

*There were tales of chalk in white bread, plaster of Paris in sweets and horsemeat in sausages*

### DISCOVER MORE

#### BOOK

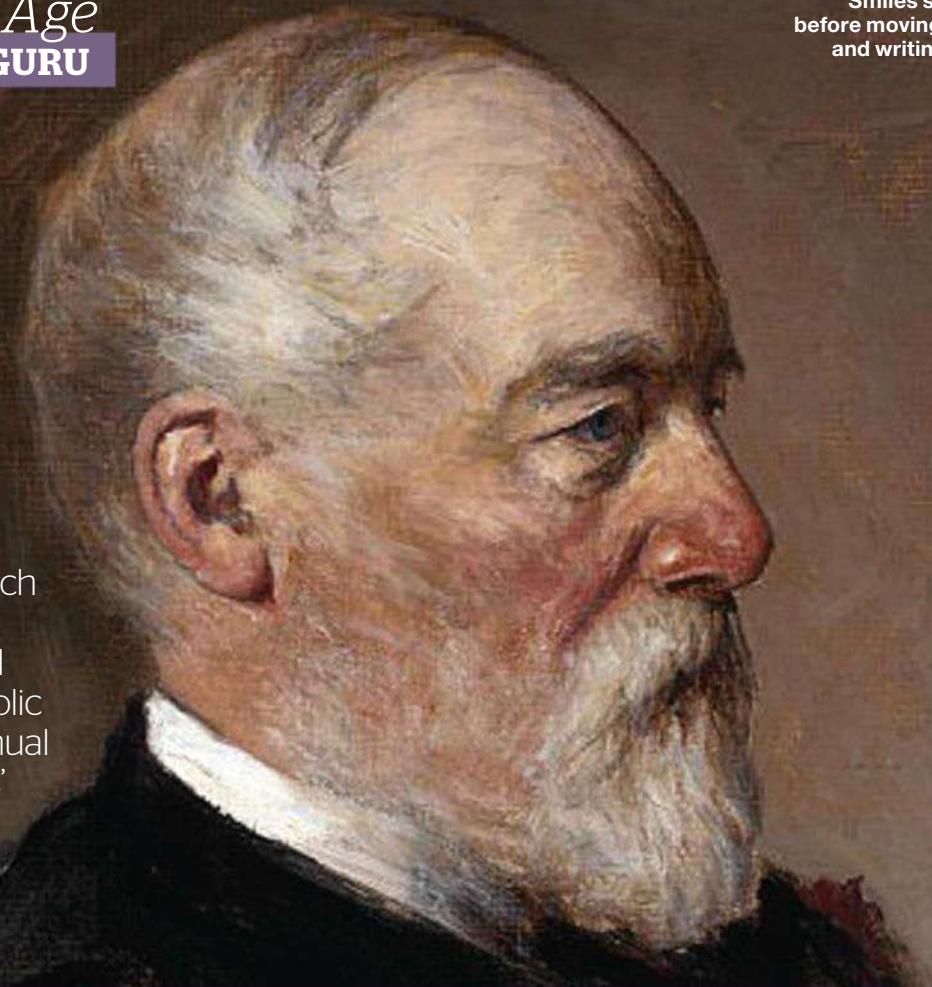
► **Violent Victorians: Popular Entertainment in Nineteenth-century London** by Rosalind Crone (Manchester University Press, 2012)



# Samuel Smiles

1812-1904

The original life coach and the often misunderstood and misquoted workaholic who wrote the manual on 'Victorian values'



**T**he greatest slave is not he who is ruled by a despot, great though that evil be, but he who is in the thrall of his own moral ignorance, selfishness, and vice," wrote Samuel Smiles in the first chapter of *Self-Help*.

The timeless message of hard work, thrift and self-discipline as the path to improving one's life was repackaged by Smiles for the Victorian age. Published in 1859, it came out in the same year as another hugely influential work, Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* – but sold considerably more copies. Few books are more misunderstood than what's been called 'the bible of mid-Victorian liberalism'. To some, it is a manifesto for greed, or a book which equates financial superiority with moral superiority. To critics on the left, Smiles is an advocate of sweatshops and union-busting.

Yet Samuel Smiles is much more complex and interesting than that. A radical in his youth, he remained an opponent of laissez-faire capitalism all his life and held it the duty of government and the better-off to provide the means whereby the working classes could elevate themselves, such as schools and libraries. He supported

extending the franchise and despised the landed aristocracy and inherited wealth. "Riches do not constitute any claim to distinction," he wrote. "It is only the vulgar who admire riches as riches."

You can see the gestation of *Self-Help* in Smiles's own background. Born in East Lothian, he came from a religious family of humble means. It's not hard to spot in his writing the austere Presbyterian self-control, or the example of his mother, who supported the family after her husband's early death.

Smiles studied medicine, but preferred writing and lecturing. He became a radical journalist, critical of the aristocracy and the Corn Laws. It was doubts about more extreme elements of Chartism which began his journey to the view that a better society could only be built through individuals taking

responsibility for improving themselves. True to his own creed, Smiles followed a punishing schedule. He held down several jobs while turning out books and countless articles and papers, as well as lecturing. His literary output covered everything from the history of the Huguenots to railways. He also penned a series of well-researched biographies of various engineers.

But it was *Self-Help, with Illustrations of Character and Conduct* which made him a household name. It was soon translated into various languages (including Indian ones), and was especially popular in Japan and Italy – even earning him a meeting with Italian nationalist Garibaldi. His themes were later developed in other works, *Character* (1871), *Thrift* (1875), *Duty* (1880) and *Life and Labour* (1887). By the time of the last, everyone had got the message, and publishers felt fit to turn down his offer of *Conduct* in the 1890s.

His legacy lives on to this day, not so much in admiration for 'Victorian values', but in the self-improvement, personal development, leadership and, of course, self-help books we continue to buy in huge numbers. **H**

Words: Eugene Byrne

*Few books are more misunderstood than what's been called 'the bible of mid-Victorian liberalism'*



# LIVING IN SIN?

Is it a myth that Victorian working-class couples skipped marriage in favour of cohabitation? **Rebecca Probert** examines the records to discover the real story

There is a widespread assumption, shared by popular and academic historians alike, that cohabitation (living together in a relationship without being married) was common among the Victorian poor. The journalist Matthew Sweet suggests in *Inventing the Victorians* that working-class men and women took an “equivocal and pragmatic approach” to marriage, with many choosing to cohabit out of economic convenience. Others refer darkly to ‘unknown’ numbers of people living in ‘irregular unions’ – the implication being that those numbers, though unknown, must nevertheless have been large. Moving from the belief that the poor did not marry to the observation that the working classes made up the largest section of the population, it is easy to fall into the trap of thinking that marriage was a minority practice in Victorian England.

Of course, individual examples of cohabiting couples can be found in all classes of Victorian society. George Eliot is a regularly cited example, and her fellow authors Mary Elizabeth Braddon and Wilkie Collins, along with the political activist Eleanor Marx, often feature alongside her on lists of Victorian cohabitants. And yes, alternatives to marriage were seriously discussed by radical thinkers such as the socialist Robert Owen in the 1830s and the early feminists of the late 19th century. But one should never confuse big names with big numbers.

Recently digitised historical data sources now clearly establish that all but a tiny fraction of Victorian couples sharing a home had gone through a ceremony of marriage. To take an example: of the couples listed in the 1851 census for Kilsby village in Northamptonshire, marriages can only be traced for two-thirds when using the old laborious method of looking through the parish registers of the most likely locations. Using modern digitised databases, though, the proportion of married couples traced rises to 100 per cent. In short, Victorian couples were both more mobile and more likely to marry than previously thought.

## Immorality hotspot

And this social conformity was not confined to rural areas: similar results were achieved for Neithrop, a poor suburb of Banbury, studied because it was notorious locally for crime and immorality. Even here, marriages have been traced for 95 per cent of those who described themselves as married in the 1851 census, and the missing five per cent can largely be accounted for by recording errors, multiple matches and marriages overseas. Nor was there generally any reason to suspect an illicit cohabiting relationship between men and their ‘housekeepers’, or between female householders and their ‘lodgers’: one couple who looked like possible cohabitants turned out to be a brother and his married sister. Even in this impoverished ward, the picture



A wedding party poses for the camera in the 1890s. Despite moralists' frenzied reports of sexual licence and immorality, cohabitation was rare







## **Cohabitation and the myth of the 'common-law marriage'**

Recent figures show that three million British couples live together outside marriage, almost 90 per cent of marrying couples have cohabited beforehand, and 47 per cent of children are born outside marriage, the majority to cohabiting couples. All this, however, is historically unprecedented.

Given the rudimentary nature and general unpopularity of birth control until recent decades, most stable sexual relationships would in time produce children. As a result, the illegitimacy ratio gives us a good idea of the maximum possible frequency of cohabiting relationships in the population. But in earlier centuries, births outside marriage were relatively rare and cohabitation proportionally even rarer. Fluctuations in the illegitimacy ratio occurred within a small scale: rising from less than two per cent in 1700 to five per cent by 1800, a little under seven per cent by 1850, then falling again to four per cent by 1900. A close examination of baptism registers suggests that, throughout this period, cohabiting couples accounted for only a tiny proportion of illegitimate births, and thus a vanishingly small proportion of births overall.

So, what changed? The causes are complex, but one factor – the emergence of the myth that cohabitants had a 'common-law marriage' – stands out. Contrary to popular belief, English law has never recognised cohabiting couples as having a 'common-law marriage'. It was not until the 1960s that the term even crept into popular usage, and it was not until the late 1970s that the myth emerged that cohabiting couples enjoyed the same rights as married couples, a misunderstanding generated by misleading media reporting of the limited legal reforms of the period.

After the myth took hold, there was a sharp rise in births outside marriage, from 16 to 30 per cent over the course of the 1980s, with cohabiting couples accounting for the bulk of the increase.

seems to have been overwhelmingly one of marital conformity.

These findings of very low levels of cohabitation are supported by the conclusions of the more measured Victorian commentators (as opposed to the hysterical polemicists who were responsible for a genre of 'slum' literature that makes today's tabloids seem restrained). Charles Booth, who carried out his survey of working-class life in London between 1886 and 1903, noted that legal marriage was the general rule even among the "roughest class". Tracing a ceremony of marriage, of course, is no guarantee that a couple were legally married: bigamists abounded, and there are plenty of examples of a man entering into a prohibited marriage with his deceased wife's sister. But the relatively high incidence of bigamy only serves to underline the significance Victorians attached to marriage. If cohabitation had been acceptable, there would have been no need to risk criminal penalties to secure respectability.

So did couples live together before they married, as is the norm today? Some historians have noted Booth's comment on the frequency with which bridal couples gave the same address, and the marriage registers support his observation. But when addresses in the marriage register are checked against census returns, it turns out that the great majority who claimed to be living together were actually residing at different addresses. Here, the census is likely to be the more reliable. There was, after all, no advantage to be gained from concealing a cohabiting relationship from census-takers. And there was a very practical reason why couples might wish to appear to be living at the same address even if they were not: vicars – and even civil registrars – faced with a couple apparently living together unwed, would often waive the marriage fee. Even though Victorians married late – when compared to the mid-20th century – it was still rare for couples to set up home in advance of the wedding.

Indeed, unmarried Victorian men and women had little scope to establish a household of their own. The Hertfordshire town of Berkhamsted had a particularly high level of unmarried adults in 1851, with 45 per cent of women aged between 25 and 34 still single and most of these living at home. A further third were working as servants. Only around five per cent headed their own household, and only one woman (out of over 100) appears to have been cohabiting with a man, whom she later married.

Very occasionally, a sexual relationship between a woman and a man sharing an address can be inferred from the presence of a child and a subsequent marriage. But this was rare, and childbearing outside marriage was

*Why has such a perception of the poor proved so popular? Middle-class Victorian moralists were willing to believe the worst*

not generally the result of a cohabiting relationship. While some areas had high levels of extramarital births – over 30 per cent in the then Lancashire parish of Culcheth, for example – it is clear that most of the mothers of illegitimate babies were not living with the father. Linking baptism and census records from a range of parishes confirms that such women were more likely to be living in the workhouse, or with family, than with any man who might be the father.

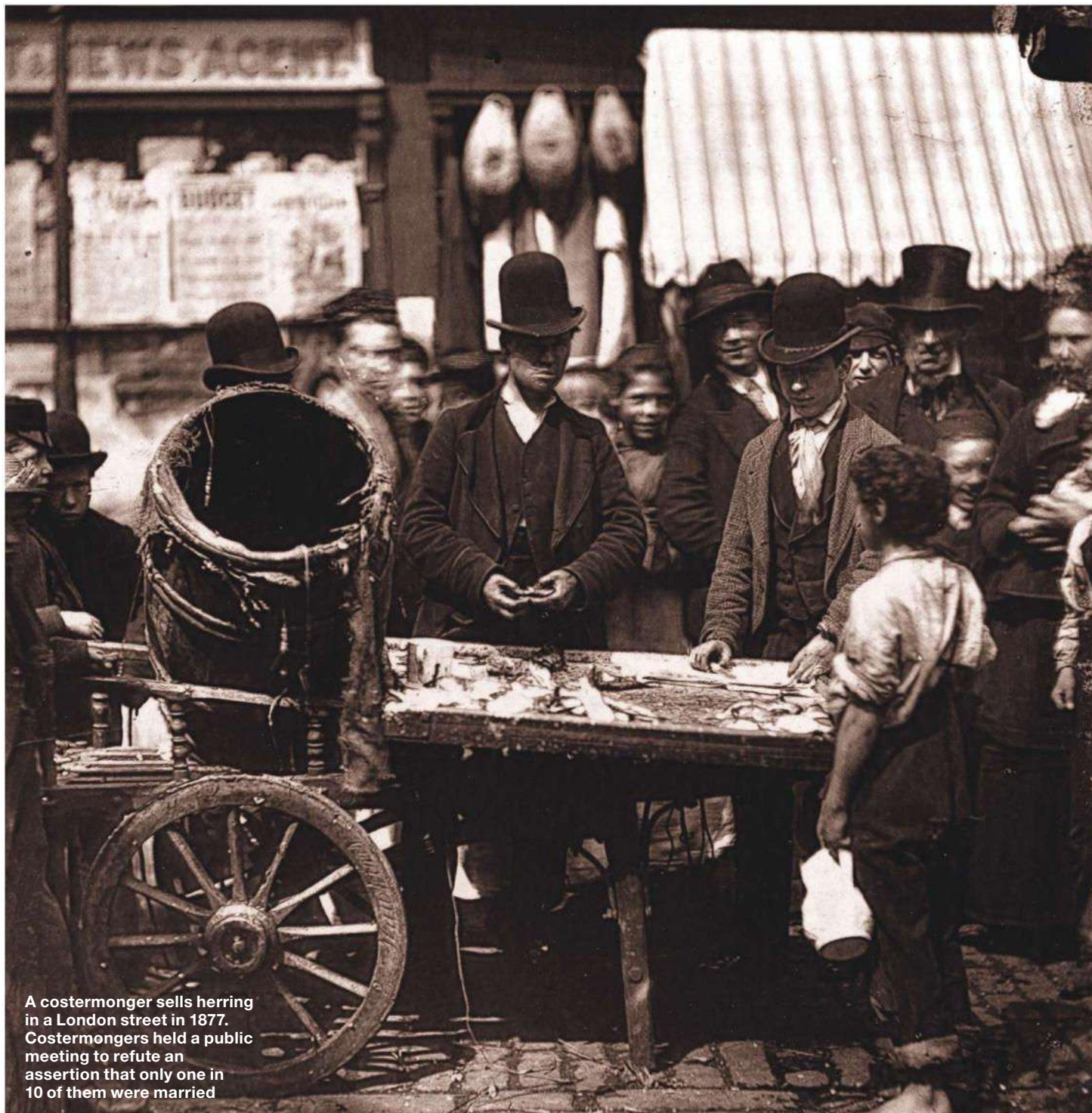
For the Victorians, relationships outside marriage tended to be surreptitious rather than openly acknowledged. The poor, dependent upon landlords, employers and occasionally charity, needed to maintain a good reputation just as much as the wealthy, if not more so. The diarist and clergyman Francis Kilvert wrote of one couple being evicted from their home simply because they were unmarried, and the receipt of social support could depend on showing one's 'marriage lines'. This was a society that drew a sharp distinction between the married and the unmarried. One writer noted that there was a public interest in knowing who was and was not married, since others' behaviour toward them had to be regulated accordingly. For most, marriage was not a 'choice', any more than putting on clothes before one left the house was a 'choice'. It was simply what one did so as not to cause trouble for oneself or offence for others.

### **Fear of the poor**

So why has such a different perception of the Victorian poor proved so popular? Middle-class Victorian moralists were willing to believe the worst of the denizens of outcast London. Fear and suspicion of the poor, who were effectively seen as a race apart, meant that any claims about immorality and sexual licence met with a receptive audience.

The journalist Henry Mayhew was pandering to this taste when he claimed in *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851) that, at most, only one in 10 of London's costermongers (who sold food from a street barrow or stall) were married. So incensed were the costermongers at this slander that





A costermonger sells herring in a London street in 1877. Costermongers held a public meeting to refute an assertion that only one in 10 of them were married

they held a public meeting to condemn Mayhew's methods. They drew attention to the fact that Mayhew was writing "to suit the tastes and views of the upper and middle classes", and that he had paid disreputable informants for inaccurate information. But they were only too well aware that it was Mayhew's account that would eventually survive, given his public platform, and so it has proved.

Today, Mayhew's costermongers tend to be celebrated rather than condemned for their supposed rejection of marriage. Social commentators' desire to find precedents for

modern trends has led to the unfounded fears of Victorian moralists about the numbers 'living in sin' being transformed into evidence of cohabitation.

Claims of high rates of cohabitation outside marriage in past centuries seem to be a comforting – but quite incorrect – riposte to modern worries about the collapse of family life. But rather than acclaiming the costermongers as the pioneers of alternative family forms, we should do them the justice of remembering them as they wanted to be remembered – as they pleaded in the name of their "poor but honest wives". **H**

**Rebecca Probert** is a professor at the University of Warwick Law School. She has written widely on the history of marriage and cohabitation and appeared on programmes such as *Who Do You Think You Are?*

#### DISCOVER MORE

##### BOOKS

- **The Legal Regulation of Cohabitation, 1600-2010: From Fornicators to Family** by Rebecca Probert (Cambridge, 2015)
- **Marriage Law for Genealogists: The Definitive Guide** by Rebecca Probert (Takeaway, 2016)



# William Ewart Gladstone

1809–98

One of the greatest statesmen in British history, who dominated the political scene, thanks to his high moral tone

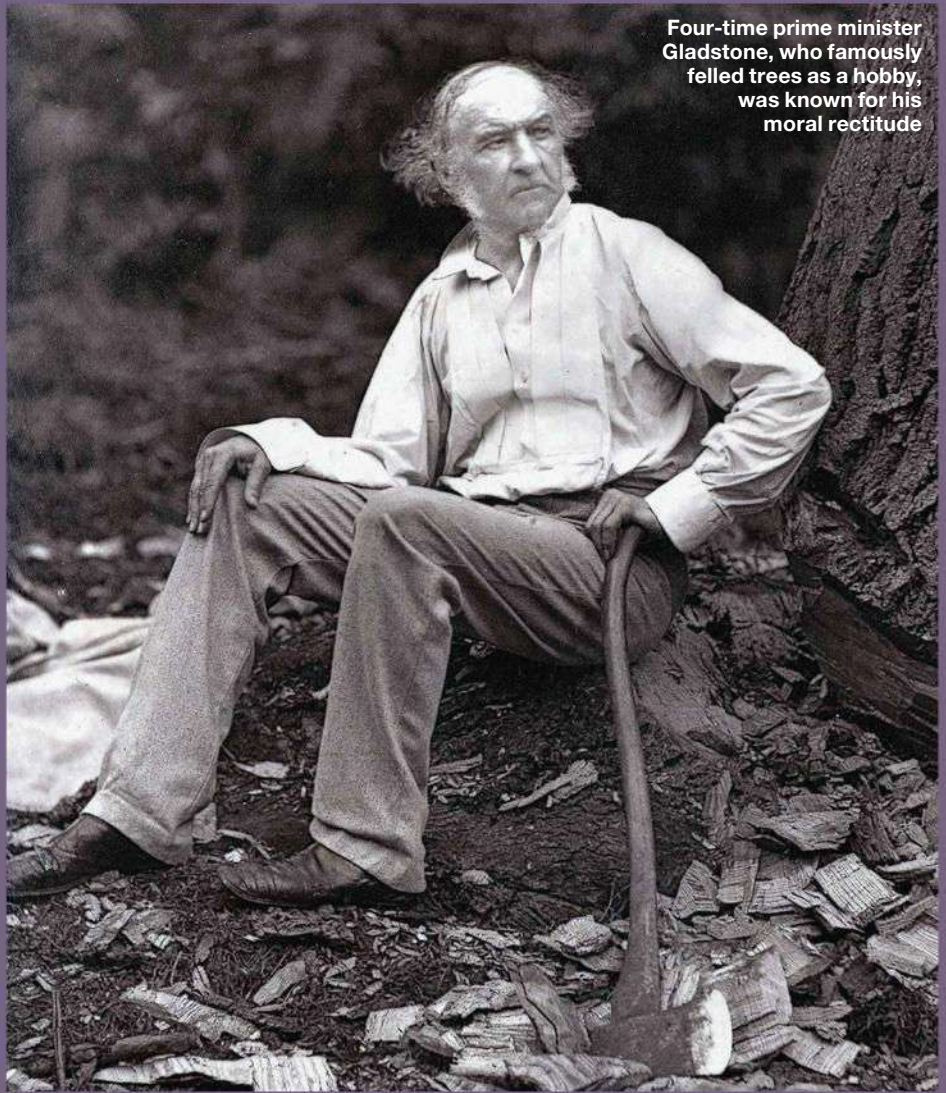
**G**ladstone's extra-parliamentary activities are of more interest to many of us nowadays than his political achievements. For much of his adult life he would walk the streets of London seeking out prostitutes in an attempt to reform them. Then, after many of these encounters he would flagellate himself in private as punishment for lustful thoughts.

Some biographers also try to read some significance into his recreational tree-felling. It was during just such a deforestation session in 1868 that he was brought the news that he would be asked to form his first government. "My mission is to pacify Ireland," he told his companion, and resumed chopping.

Gladstone's energetic axe-work was probably nothing more than an eccentric choice of exercise, as he was not much interested in any sport. That said, he did once walk 33 miles in the rain through the Cairngorms to escape the boredom of Balmoral.

Queen Victoria famously never got on with him ("He speaks to me as if I was a public meeting"). Consciously or not, one of the biggest disfavours his rival Disraeli did him was to coax the queen out of mourning to take more interest in government. Disraeli's relentless flattery was an act that Gladstone had neither the ability nor inclination to follow.

Gladstone, from a Liverpool merchant family with Scottish forebears, was born to wealth and privilege. After Eton and Oxford, where he proved his early abilities as an orator, he entered parliament in 1832 as a Tory. His maiden speech was in



Four-time prime minister Gladstone, who famously felled trees as a hobby, was known for his moral rectitude

support of more compensation money for slave owners on abolition; at this time his own family owned 2,500 or more plantation slaves in the Caribbean.

While this first foray into public life looks like the very worst of the 'Old Corruption' of the pre-Reform era, Gladstone soon adjusted himself to the more technocratic style of Victorian politics, and with a moral rectitude which more worldly politicians found irritating.

While many of Gladstone's contemporaries made the political journey from radicalism to Conservatism, or at least liberalism, Gladstone is one of the few who went in the opposite direction, and he remained a dominant force in British politics for almost 50 years through spells as chancellor of the exchequer and four terms as prime minister.

He was a brilliant orator, he was experienced in the day-to-day trickery of politics, but over and above all this, his extreme Anglican religiosity held the key to his political longevity.

In the end, it might be argued that his sense of mission caused the one major failure of his

career – Ireland. His eventual Home Rule bills were defeated in the Commons and Lords respectively.

While 'The People's William' or 'Grand Old Man' inspired adulation in some, he had the respect, often grudging, of many more. One could not imagine him doing anything dishonest or unChristian.

"He has not a single redeeming defect," Disraeli complained.

Gladstone and Disraeli, who seem to have genuinely despised one another, are now remembered as the great political double-act of Victoria's reign, two men whose dramatically opposed temperaments embodied the Roundhead and Cavalier heritage of the parties they led. **H**

*Words: Eugene Byrne*

*Gladstone was a dominant force in British politics for almost 50 years*



# “The killings had to be **cold-blooded**, the perpetrators **calculating monsters**”

**Clive Bloom** lifts the lid on the Victorians' grisly fascination with murder - from the case of the constable-killer who believed he was Christ to the ruthless conman who drowned his wives in the bath

ILLUSTRATIONS BY BEN JONES





# Kent's pirate king dies a hero

**D**uring the 18th century, one surefire way of garnering the acclaim of your fellow countrymen – and, if you were lucky, earning a fast buck – was to carve out for yourself a career in crime.

The Georgian public widely hailed those who chose to live outside of the law – smugglers and highwaymen among them – as popular heroes. And if these rebels could create merry hell for the authorities while they were going about their illicit business, then all the better.

By the time Queen Victoria came to the throne in 1837, attitudes to crime were hardening. Yet some lawbreakers were still able to win a place in the public's affections – and perhaps nowhere is this better illustrated than in the career of 'Sir William Percy Honeywood Courtenay'.

Courtenay's real name was plain John Nichols Thom from Truro, but by the time he arrived in Canterbury in 1832 he had awarded himself a knighthood and changed

his name. Having tried – and failed – to win a seat in parliament, Courtenay could soon be seen around town sporting a velvet suit and hat reminiscent of a pirate king, with a scimitar strapped to his waist which he called 'Excalibur'. At this point he was certainly suffering delusional episodes and voluntarily entered an asylum.

Shortly after regaining his freedom, Courtenay fell into the belief that he was Christ returned to Earth. Local villagers believed him too and he was soon leading a local rebellion for 'liberty'. In May 1838 Courtenay shot dead a constable and, when Lieutenant Henry Bennett arrived on the scene leading a detachment of soldiers, Courtenay dispatched him too (making Bennett the first Victorian soldier to be killed in combat). Courtenay was also killed in the shootout, and so died Britain's last true rural outlaw, a hero despite his murderous career. His followers waited three days for his resurrection.



# A fatal brush with flypaper



**"Wives were demons of domestic hell, intent on poisoning their husbands"**

**B**y the middle of the 19th century, the public had, for the most part, stopped swooning at wild, reckless outlaws like John Nichols Thom and turned their attentions – with prurient, horrified fascination – to murder in the privacy of the suburban villa. The killings had to be deliberate and cold-blooded, the perpetrators calculating monsters. And, for many men, women fitted the bill perfectly. Wives were no longer the 'angels of the hearth' but potential demons of domestic hell, intent on poisoning their husbands and families.

Such was the case with Madeleine Smith, the Glaswegian daughter of a wealthy architect. Smith began an affair with Pierre L'Angelier at the same time as her family found her a suitable husband in William Minnoch. Furious, L'Angelier threatened blackmail if Smith didn't marry him, but before he could carry out his threat he was dead from an overdose of arsenic. Once the lovers' letters were found, Smith was arrested. The letters were,

however, poorly catalogued by the police and did not prove murder, so Smith walked free.

Florence Chandler, an American born to a wealthy family in Mobile, Alabama, wasn't so

lucky. She married James Maybrick, a Liverpool merchant and hypochondriac who took arsenic to cure imagined ills. He also happened to be 23 years her senior.

The Maybricks soon found themselves being invited to the best parties, but it wasn't long before their unconventional relationship was catching up with them: Mrs Maybrick's infidelities were soon causing tongues to wag, while Mr Maybrick's secret life – he had fathered five illegitimate children by different women – also proved a rich source of gossip.

In April 1889, Florence bought flypaper infused with arsenic and soaked it to decant the poison for cosmetic use. Then, on 27 April, James apparently took a massive dose of strychnine and fell ill. James's brother soon became suspicious and held Florence captive in her house while he 'investigated' a note sent to her lover, Alfred Brierley.

On 11 May Maybrick died and a pathologist's report showed traces of arsenic in his stomach. Florence was finally charged and sent to trial. She was convicted of murder, but without any real proof. The sentence was therefore commuted to life imprisonment for 'intent to murder' and Florence was released only in 1904, dying penniless and forgotten on 23 October 1941.



# A one-way ticket to disaster



**B**y the late 19th century, the Victorians were becoming ever more fearful of the terrors that lurked below the surface of polite society. Yet if crime fuelled the fear, then the appearance of one of *the* great fictional detectives went some way, at least, to soothing it. Sherlock Holmes made his debut in 'A Study in Scarlet' in *Beeton's Christmas Annual*. The tale addressed the twin issues of lawlessness and societal disintegration – and it's probably no coincidence that it was published in 1887, the same year as the Bloody Sunday riot in Trafalgar Square (in which 75 people were badly injured in clashes between demonstrators and police), seen by many as a portent of revolution.

Yet, as Holmes's many high-speed adventures aboard trains prove, if social decay was widely regarded as the backdrop for the late Victorian crime wave, then the rise of the railways provided a murderous new platform on which these crimes could be carried out. Trains had transformed Britain over the past half-century but, by the time Holmes was bringing master criminals to book, they were regarded as so dangerous that women would put pins in their mouths while travelling through tunnels to avoid amorous advances.

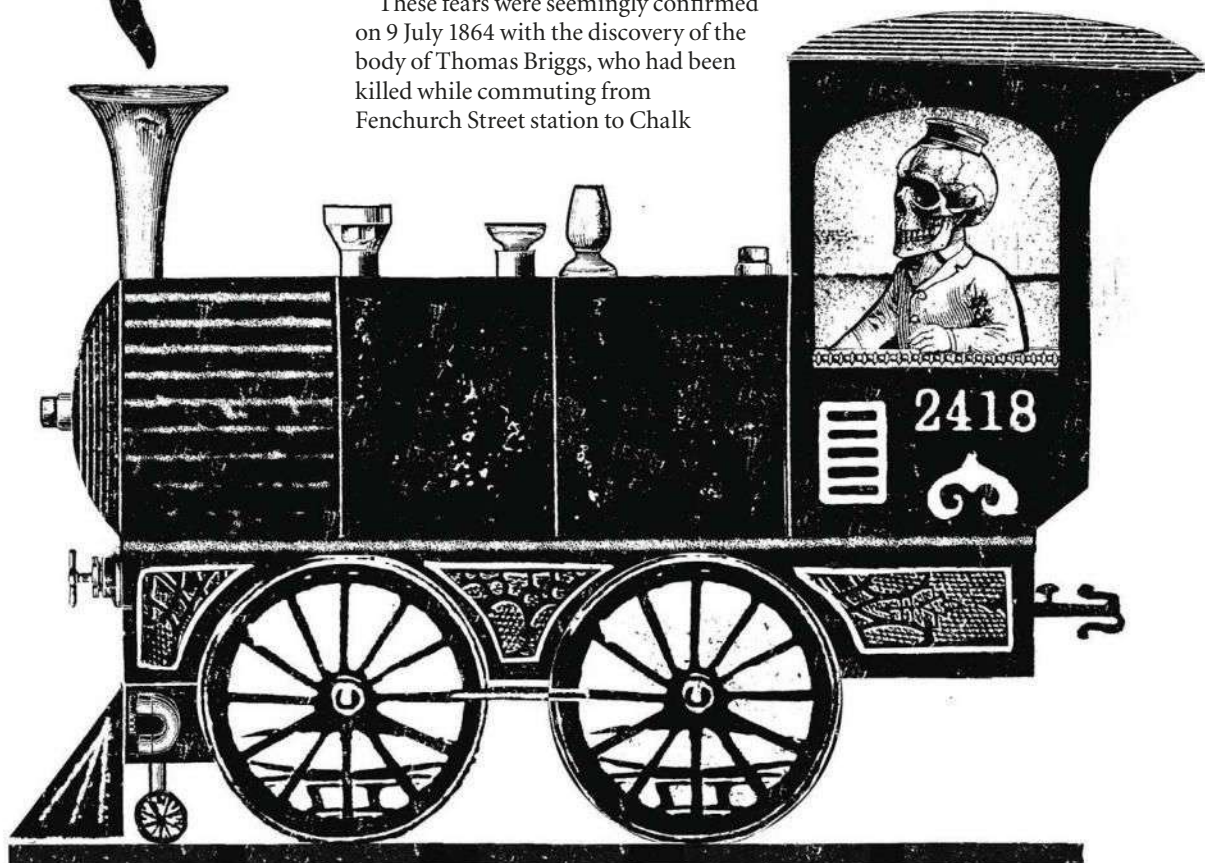
These fears were seemingly confirmed on 9 July 1864 with the discovery of the body of Thomas Briggs, who had been killed while commuting from Fenchurch Street station to Chalk

Farm – earning the dubious distinction of being the first person to be murdered on Britain's railways.

The scent soon led to a German called Franz Muller, who had tried to sell a watch and chain stolen from the unfortunate Briggs at a jeweller's and had evaded the police by fleeing to New York. Muller's escape was only temporary, though, for Scotland Yard detectives had travelled on a trans-Atlantic steamer and beaten the murderer to his refuge.

Arrested and tried, Muller was hanged on 14 November 1864 in front of 50,000 spectators, despite the kaiser asking for clemency. Unsurprisingly, the case threw the spotlight on passenger safety and led to the installation aboard trains of corridors and spy holes called 'Muller's Lights'.

**"Women put pins in their mouths while travelling through tunnels to avoid amorous advances"**





# The dark tale of the baby farmer



**T**here was never enough real evidence to make a waterproof case against Smith or Maybrick, just the scandal of ruined women. There was proof enough, however, against Amelia Dyer, a 'baby farmer' who would become the century's most notorious serial killer.

Dyer had begun her working life as a nurse, but had fallen in with a murderous midwife and switched to a more lucrative career. She was soon acting as a carer for illegitimate children, dosing her wards, or 'nurse children', with opium or letting them starve to death. Bored with waiting for the children to die, Dyer soon took to murdering them as soon as they were in her 'care'.

During her life, Dyer was committed to asylums, convicted of neglect and addicted to drink and drugs – yet it took 20 years for

the spotlight of suspicion to fall on her for being a baby killer. Her downfall came when a child's body was retrieved from the Thames with an address and label for a 'Mrs Thomas'. The label led the authorities to her door, but it was only after a police raid that it was revealed that Mrs Thomas was not only Dyer, but that she had murdered several children in the previous month alone.

Arrested on 4 April 1896, Dyer's grisly two-decade career came to an end when she was hanged on 10 June 1896 for the murder of between 200 and 400 children. She had pocketed the money and simply moved on under the protective smokescreen of public attitudes, which stigmatised illegitimacy, and the law, which ignored the responsibility of fathers.

# Brought to book by a bar of soap

**B**y the Edwardian period, the forensic scientist had taken his seat alongside the detective at the top table of the public's affections. And nowhere did this new hero display his glittering skills more spectacularly than in the case of the Brides in the Bath murders.

In 1915, Sherlock Holmes's creator, Arthur Conan Doyle, had gained special entry to the trial of George Smith, where he bore witness to the last music-hall gasp of Victorian villainy. Smith was a man in constant need of money. He was sufficiently plausible to trick older women into becoming his wives, spending all their life savings and getting them to sign life insurance policies to pay for his fictitious antique and picture restoring businesses.

Between 1908 and 1914, Smith contracted seven bigamous marriages. When he was finally apprehended he had also dispatched three of his wives. Each one had been bought a 'luxurious' new bath and each had perished by throwing a fit and allegedly drowning. Smith had simply returned the bath to the ironmonger and disappeared with the money. A series of coincidences, backed by the suspicions of some of Smith's

landlords and detectives, ultimately led to his apprehension.

Doyle had already seen the forensic pathologist Bernard Spilsbury in action, employing his deductive skill to send the infamous wife-killer Hawley Harvey Crippen to the gallows. Doyle was further able to marvel at the evidence given by the pathologist regarding the experiment by which he had proved how Smith had killed his victims by pulling them under the bath water. Spilsbury's diagnosis and the solution to the case had revolved around signs of 'goose skin' (goose bumps) on the thigh of Bessie Mundy, whom Smith had drowned in lodgings in Herne Bay. She also had an unnatural grip on a bar of soap. The case broke new ground. It was possibly the first time that police detection in a case of multiple murders and forensic investigation had combined to provide a conviction.

The forensic science and leaps of imaginative deduction that Spilsbury employed seemed to turn Holmes's fictional dabbling in blood types and cigar ash into an exact science of logical deductions from which criminals could no longer escape justice. Like Holmes, Spilsbury could be both dogmatic and bullying, but he was still popularly nicknamed the 'real Sherlock Holmes' for his supposedly infallible methods. **H**

**"Smith had killed his victims by pulling them under the bath water"**



Clive Bloom is emeritus professor of English and American studies at Middlesex University. His books include *Victoria's Madmen: Revolution and Alienation* (Palgrave, 2013)

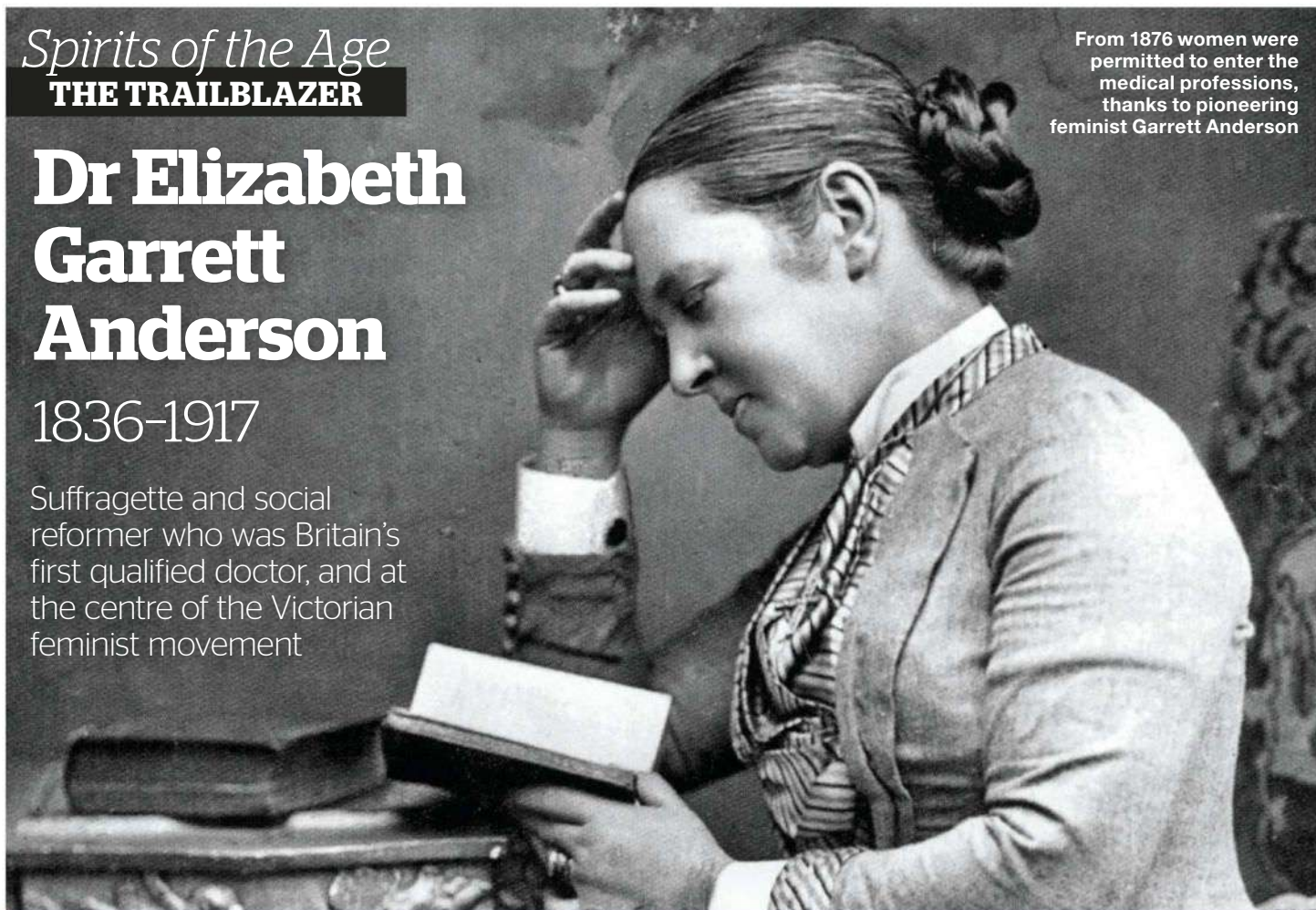


# Dr Elizabeth Garrett Anderson

1836–1917

Suffragette and social reformer who was Britain's first qualified doctor, and at the centre of the Victorian feminist movement

From 1876 women were permitted to enter the medical professions, thanks to pioneering feminist Garrett Anderson



If, as Victoria was crowned, you had suggested that perhaps now women should play a bigger part in wider public life, you would have been regarded as a crank. Yet, by the time of her funeral, the idea that women had a role outside of the home had a growing number of supporters.

The Victorian era saw the start of a recognisably modern feminist movement, and Elizabeth Garrett Anderson was one of its key figures. One of a number of pioneering women doctors, she was an active women's suffrage campaigner and, a few years after Victoria's death, was elected mayor of Aldeburgh, becoming the first female mayor in England.

Born into a large, enterprising middle-class family, the young Elizabeth Garrett railed against the limitations of girls' education and roles in life, and eventually determined to become a doctor. The medical profession would be one of the first male professions that women tried to enter. Both Elizabeth Blackwell (1821–1910), the first British woman to qualify as a doctor (though in America), and Garrett (whom Blackwell encouraged) saw medicine as a feminist issue, because women were literally being killed by their reluctance to undergo intimate examination by male doctors.

After immense struggle and opposition, Garrett studied for, and obtained the licence of, the Society of Apothecaries in 1865, and five years later qualified as an MD at the University of Paris. By now there were other women knocking at the profession's door, notably the 'Edinburgh Seven', a small band of women led by Sophia Jex-Blake, who were allowed to matriculate as medical students at Edinburgh University.

Garrett was at the core of the Victorian women's movement, as was her sister Millicent, who married politician Henry Fawcett, and also became prominent in the drive for women's suffrage. Garrett was active in campaigns to promote women's employment and was on the first Women's Suffrage Committee in 1866. She continued

to call for the vote into her old age, even alarming more conservative residents of Aldeburgh, where she was living in retirement.

Her medical career combined both private practice in London with charitable work. She set up a dispensary (outpatients clinic) for poor women and children in Marylebone and in 1870 was the first woman to be elected to the London School Board; she gained more votes than all the other London candidates, thanks to the votes of her dispensary patients' husbands and a campaign run by businessman James Anderson, whom she married early the following year.

In 1872 she opened a small hospital above the dispensary as the New Hospital for Women, the first in Britain with all-female medical staff. By 1890 it had expanded to 42 beds in Euston Road.

Unsurprisingly, given the energy and focus she had had to devote to her career, Garrett Anderson's bedside manner was said to be brusque, though with touches of dry humour. She was a model of cool professionalism, telling her students: "the first thing women must learn is to dress like ladies and behave like gentlemen". **H**

Words: Eugene Byrne

*The young Elizabeth railed against the limitations of girls' education and roles in life, and determined to become a doctor*





Furnishings were used to portray men's social status. This 1858 portrait shows businessman Henry Thomas Lambert surrounded by the trappings of success

MUSEUM OF LONDON—MUSEUM IN DOCKLANDS/V&A IMAGES



# MAN ABOUT THE HOUSE

The domestic demands of the Victorian home may have fallen to women but, as **Jane Hamlett** explores, when it came to furnishing and decorating, middle-class men carved out their own spaces

**T**he Victorian woman is often thought of as an ‘angel in the house’. We know that supervising cooking, cleaning and the daily running of the household was usually a woman’s lot. But what was a man’s role in the home? How did middle-class men and women negotiate decorative decision making?

Surprisingly, Victorian men were often enthusiastic decorators, seeking out furniture, selecting colour schemes and even fretting over carpets. In terms of property rights, men in the 19th century wielded considerable control over the furnishing of their homes. Until the reforms of marriage law in 1870 and 1882, a woman’s property became her husband’s on marriage. So, unless specific arrangements were made at the time of marriage, women were financially dependent on their husbands. As a result, men were often the ultimate controllers of the family purse strings.

The objects a man chose for his home were also a symbol of his social standing. A portrait of Henry Thomas Lambert by George Townsend Cole, dated 1858 (see opposite) shows how furnishings could be used to portray male identity and social status. Lambert, a sail maker and ship chandler, is shown in the parlour above his warehouse, overlooking the Pool of London. The rich objects in the room include vases, trellis-patterned wallpaper, floral carpets and ornaments under a glass dome, displaying wealth and power, but also a strong commitment to domesticity.

The idea that a middle-class man was responsible for the provision of household goods was strongly felt in Victorian culture. Anthony Trollope’s Dr Thorne was praised for the comfortable home he provided for his young niece. In *Wives and Daughters*, Elizabeth Gaskell subtly criticised the character of Dr Gibson, using his failure to decorate his home himself to denote his disengagement with home and family. The threat posed by male mismanagement in upper-class families was expressed in Robert Braithwaite Martineau’s 1862 painting *The Last Day in the Old Home* (see overleaf). A gentry family are shown on the verge of leaving their ancestral home, thanks to male profligacy. An extravagant father encourages his son to drink champagne, while his female relatives look on in passive despair, surrounded by the possessions that they will soon lose owing to his reckless behaviour.

## Men at work

Male diaries show that home responsibilities were taken seriously. Edward Ryde, a surveyor from London and Woking, kept a detailed account of how he refurbished his bachelor quarters in anticipation of his

approaching nuptials in the late 1840s. Ryde and his new wife Sarah initially lived on the premises he had occupied as a bachelor in London, before moving to 60 Warwick Square which he built in 1864. The diary shows that the transformation of bachelor quarters into marital home was a matter of interest and personal pride for Ryde. Shortly after the marriage he noted, “much pleased with the appearance of our newly furnished sitting room, which thanks to Patty [his servant] is in apple pie order”. When Ryde later built new homes, he bought and arranged goods in the houses before Sarah arrived, presenting her with a fait accompli.

Certain spaces within the Victorian middle-class home were marked out for male use. The later part of the 19th century saw a dramatic growth in advice literature on domestic matters, including the decoration of the home. Writers of these books viewed dining rooms, libraries, studies, smoking rooms and billiard rooms as male, while drawing rooms, morning rooms and boudoirs were seen as female. In *The Gentleman’s House*, first published in 1864, the architect Robert Kerr stressed that the drawing room should be “entirely ladylike”. This view was later upheld by HR Jennings in his book *Our Homes and How to Beautify Them*, published in 1902. Jennings stated that: “My contention is that the Dining Room should be the man’s Paradise, as the Drawing Room is the woman’s”.

Feminine spaces were decorated in a light, airy fashion and were often heavily ornamented. Male spaces, however, were picked out in darker, sombre colours and had heavier furniture. Dark oak and mahogany were recommended.

*Dining rooms, libraries, studies, smoking rooms and billiard rooms were all viewed as male*



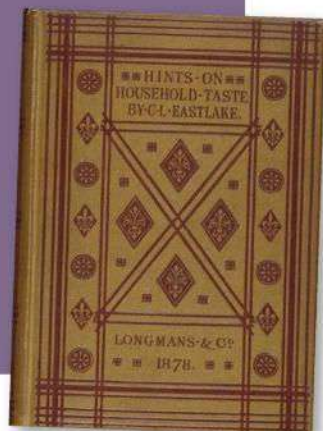
## Him vs her:

## Charles Eastlake's books reveal the battle of the sexes at home

How 19th-century couples wrangled over furnishings is revealed by the case of Charles and Eliza Eastlake. Charles Eastlake was born in Plymouth in 1836, the son of George Eastlake, an admiralty law agent, and was later articled to the architect Philip Hardwick. He became a leading authority on taste and the author of the highly successful decorative advice manual *Hints on Household Taste in Furniture, Upholstery and other Details*, published in 1868. *Hints* was often sceptical about female taste, blaming under-educated women for the follies of mid-Victorian decoration. The book aimed to reform young ladies who "know what they like". It also railed against the "materfamilias" who was all too easily swayed by the blandishments of salesmen: "The good lady looks from one carpet to another until she is fairly dazzled by their hues."

Yet Eastlake struggled to stamp his taste on his own home. In October 1856 he married Eliza Bailey. The couple first set up home in Bloomsbury, but in later years lived on Dexter Square in Bayswater. Eastlake's last book, *Our Square and Circle*, published in 1895 under his pseudonym Jack Easel, painted a very different picture of gendered taste. Eastlake was actively involved in furnishing his home, creating a "sanctum" for his own work, and selecting his favourite "solanum" wallpaper for the bedroom. But despite his disapproval of female trinkets, he was unable to prevent his wife from scattering her ornaments about the home. A particular source of irritation was a heavy overmantel in the bedroom, and the drawing-room occasional tables: "On these pieces of furniture my wife is pleased to pile books, newspapers, flower pots, work-baskets, and photograph stands in such an ingenious manner that it is difficult to remove one article without disturbing the rest...for my own part I generally lose not only the game but also my temper".

Charles Eastlake's *Hints on Household Taste* (1868) promoted 'male' tastes



*"It should not be furnished too frivolously or suggest flirtation instead of... proper, severe application to one's books"*

These various distinctions are exemplified in a doll's house built in the 1860s for Mrs Bryant of Surbiton, and now displayed in the V&A's Museum of Childhood. The house was based on her own home and faithfully represented the way it was furnished. The drawing room is decorated in pale colours, while the study is deep red, a colour that was conventionally associated with male spaces.

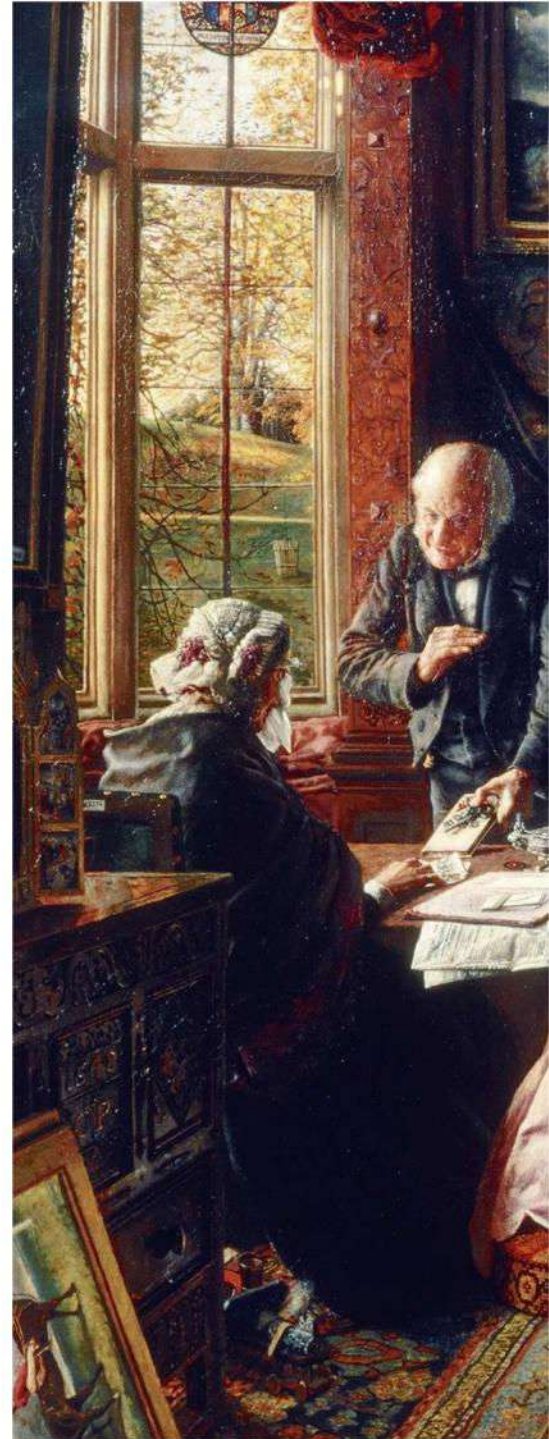
Libraries and studies were viewed as particularly sacred to male endeavour. Kerr called for the chamber to be "quiet and sober", and Charles Eastlake, author of *Hints on Household Taste* (see box, left), found less to cavil at in the library than in the rest of the house, proclaiming "Here at least the furniture – usually of oak – is strong and solid". It was advised that servants and children should only enter with special permission. Decoration, meanwhile, was designed to reflect serious usage. Jane Ellen Panton, author of the manual *From Kitchen to Garrett: Hints for Young Householders* (1887), declared that: "there should be a certain sobriety about it, and it should not be furnished too frivolously or in such a manner as to suggest flirtation instead of study [or], sweet sleep instead of proper, severe application to one's books."

## Somewhere for a smoke

The smoking room was more controversial. Kerr gave the male side of the argument: "The pitiable resources to which some gentlemen are driven, even in their own

houses, in order to be able to enjoy the pestiferous luxury of a cigar, have given rise to the occasional introduction of an apartment specially dedicated to the use of tobacco." Jennings emphasised the value of the smoking room as a male retreat: "The room should at once convey a feeling of retirement from the throb and tumult of the hurry-scurrying world."

However, not everyone agreed. Panton insisted that smoking should be banished to the nether regions of the



house. "There is nothing more trying than an atmosphere of stale smoke, and I look forward to a time when men of the rising generation will be a little less selfish than they are at present in their indulgence of a habit." Rather than setting aside a male space for smoking, Panton argued that the third sitting room in the house should be devoted to the needs of its mistress.

Beyond the pages of the advice manual, male terrains in the home were not always sacrosanct. Many middle-class homes, especially those in urban areas, filled with large families and servants, simply did not have enough room for separate male and female spaces. Hubert Nicholson, the son of a printer from Hull, remembered of his early 20th-century childhood home that "we were packed tightly into a box too small for us".





Male betrayal: in *The Last Day in the Old Home* (1862), a father and son drink champagne as the family home is sold off

Moreover, children did not always respect these boundaries. Although the study could be a space in which male authority was meted out, where reprimands were administered, it was also vulnerable to incursion. Horace Collins, the son of a Maida Vale architect, recalled: "The comfortable airy library, surrounded by well-filled bookcases and shelves, on the first floor, was supposed to be my father's sanctum, but it was invaded by the whole household and was the room most frequented." This noisy room could be too much: "Poor Father, overcome by the persistent gabble, would hastily retreat to his bedroom and there remain with a book in comparative peace."

### New century, new attitude

During the 20th century, marking out spaces for men and women fell out of favour.

Panton, writing in 1910, remarked that husbands and wives increasingly inhabited the same rooms, a change which she linked to the growing use of the divorce courts. Edward W Gregory, whose *Art and Craft of Homemaking* was first published in 1913, felt that the smoking room had become ostentatious and offensive: "At one time the smoking-cap and smoking jacket were fashionable. Nowadays they would make a man feel a fool and look it." Mrs Arthur Stallard, the writer of *The House as Home*, also published in 1913, celebrated the demise of the smoking room, as she believed separation had a negative influence on husband and wife, and the room was "accountable for a good deal of harm".

So, in the years following the First World War, smoking rooms and boudoirs fell out of

use, apart from in the houses of the very wealthy. However, the choice of furniture for the home continued to be a matter for negotiation between husband and wife, much as it is today. **H**

**Dr Jane Hamlett** is a lecturer in modern British history at Royal Holloway, University of London

### DISCOVER MORE

#### BOOKS

► **Material Relations: Domestic Interiors and Middle-Class Families in England 1850–1910** by Jane Hamlett (Manchester University Press, 2015)

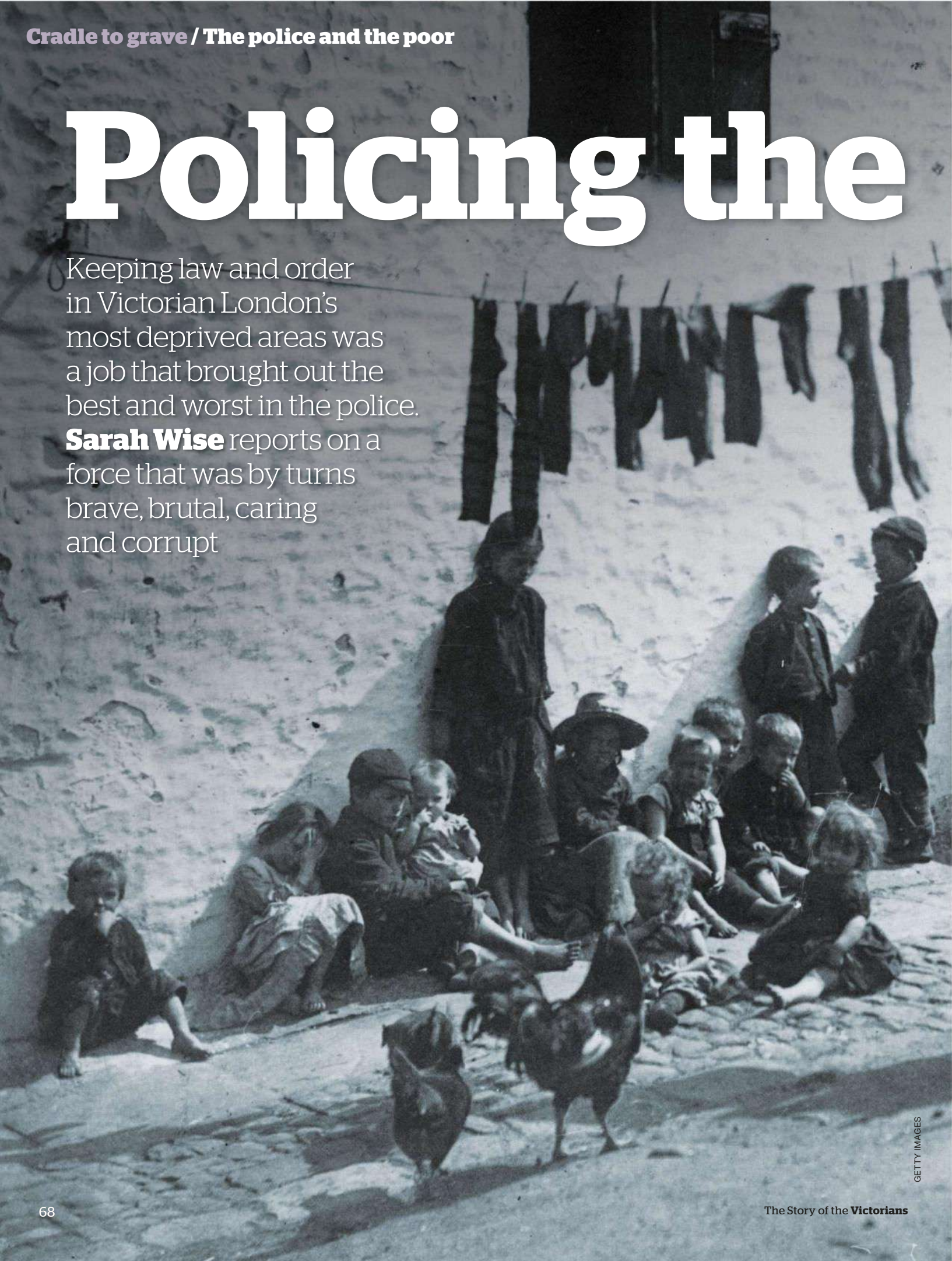
► **Inside the Victorian Home: A Portrait of Domestic Life in Victorian England** by Judith Flanders (Norton, 2005)



# Policing the

Keeping law and order in Victorian London's most deprived areas was a job that brought out the best and worst in the police.

**Sarah Wise** reports on a force that was by turns brave, brutal, caring and corrupt





# slums



Children sitting in a London courtyard, 1889. Youngsters living in the capital's slums had a complex relationship with the local police



To be a policeman in Victorian London's most deprived areas was to be a target for suspicion, resentment and widespread loathing – not to mention a shrewd, dry wit. A local vicar learned as much when talking to an inhabitant of the East End slum of the Old Nichol in the late 1880s. "Oh yes, the Lord is very good," the elderly resident sardonically revealed. "If He does not come for you Himself, He'll often send two policemen to fetch you."

Other churchmen, charity workers and teachers agreed that one of the main difficulties they had to overcome when trying to establish relationships with the Old Nichol's inhabitants was the notion that they were in league with the police. Until Nichol people fully accepted that the Met would not be privy to any information divulged, there would be an utter lack of trust and an unwillingness to communicate with the very agencies who came into the slum to try to help.

The Nichol was a square quarter-mile of dilapidated, scandalously insanitary housing that stood, until the mid-1890s, immediately to the east of Shoreditch High Street. It was home to 5,700 people (two-fifths of whom were children) and had among the highest mortality levels in England and Wales. Its unemployment rate was high and jobs were often precariously casual and appallingly paid. There was a higher than average number of female-headed households and of 'ticket-of-leave men' (prisoners out on parole). In a too-sweeping condemnation of the Nichol, the local school board officer, John Reeves, wrote: "The whole moral tone was inconceivably low. The life of the people was chiefly occupied in deception and concealment. There was scarcely a family but appeared to have some reason for fearing the police."

The Nichol's 30 or so streets, alleys and courts had a curious maze-like topography, and this, together with the district's appearance of deep poverty, gave rise to the notion that it was a thieves' paradise, with villains easily able to outrun a pursuing policeman by being better able to negotiate the labyrinth.

One tiny square – officially called Orange Court, but known locally as 'Little Hell' – was entered by a narrow passage that ran below a first-storey room and appeared to be a dead end. But, in fact, a number of back doors that opened on to it offered to cognoscenti a range of exit routes into other streets. When two policemen patrolled one Sunday morning along the passage and into

*Local newspapers make it clear that where a doctor defaulted in his duty, it was the police the public would turn to*

Orange Court, the first, upon emerging into the square, was felled by a fire-grate hurled down on to him by someone in the building above. Thankfully not badly injured, the officer and his colleague ran off, knowing that they would be unable to make arrests without back-up.

No documentation survives that allows us to hear the end of this story. But it was not an isolated incident: in the Nichol, miniature battles between beat coppers and locals were not unusual. On the afternoon of 29 July 1888, PC 111H attempted to arrest a young boy for

**Children pictured in a London slum, c1895. The police often came to the aid of boys such as these when they got lost on the capital's streets**



playing the street-gambling game Pitch & Toss – one of a range of street activities that were illegal. The boy's enraged father, Richard Leary, attempted a 'rescue' of the lad. The constable went off for reinforcements and returned to the house in Old Nichol Street where the family lived. Leary Senior claimed – and was backed by eyewitnesses, who appeared in nearby Worship Street magistrates' court with a range of allegedly police-inflicted cuts and contusions – that the officers had then set about him with their batons. A small crowd gathered and pelted the officers with stones and bits of brick. Either Leary or a neighbour, 22-year-old Mary Hunt (witnesses refused to specify which), threw a six pound chunk of masonry from a first-floor window on to the head of PC 204H. Leary was given one month's hard labour and Hunt was fined ten shillings – the latter a comparatively lenient sentence that may suggest the magistrate had some trouble believing the police officers' accounts of events.

### **Assaulted with a stick**

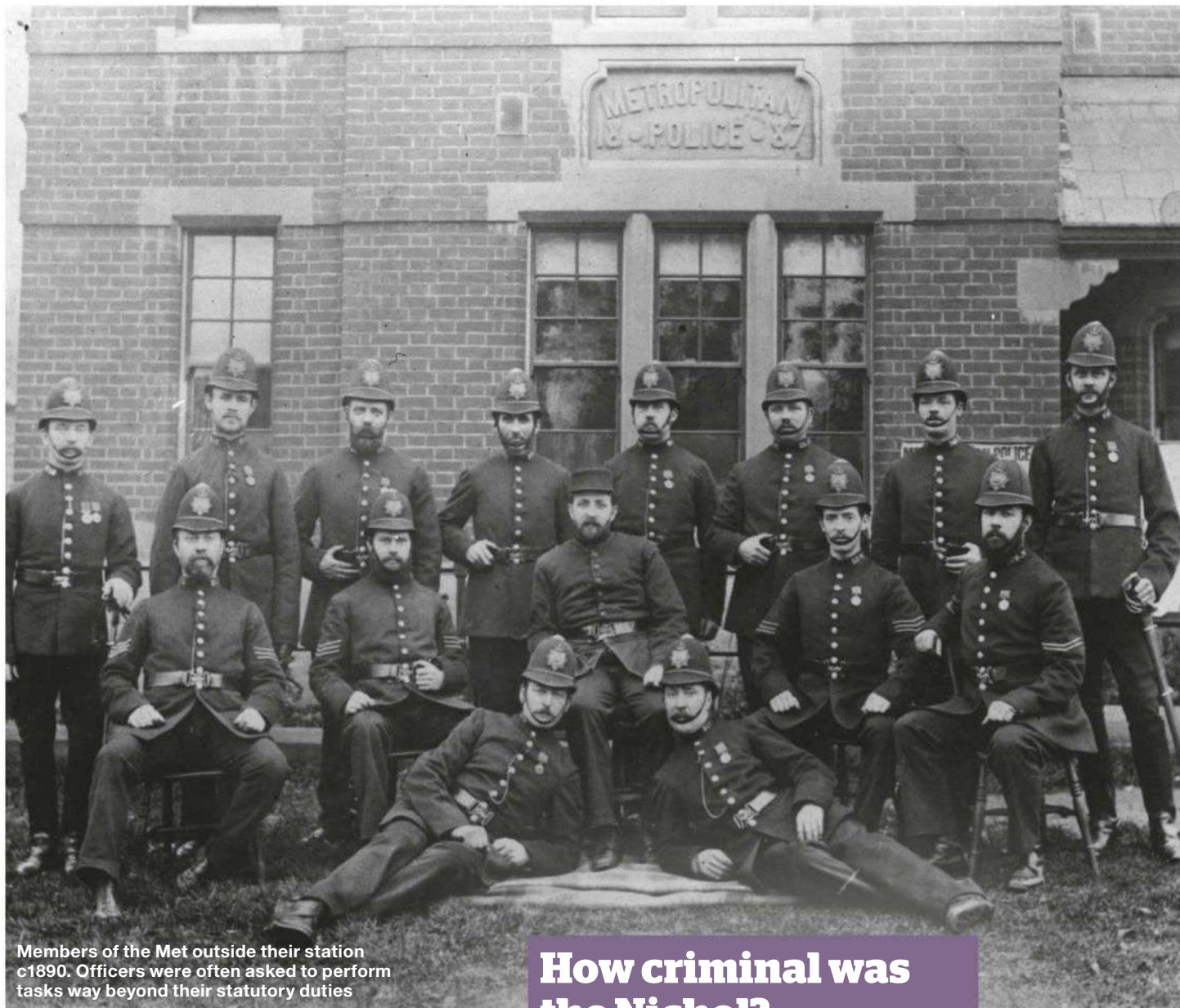
Certain London magistrates were quite openly hostile to Metropolitan Police officers, rejecting their evidence and setting free a defendant. Constable 396H was accused outright of lying by a Worship Street magistrate, when he claimed that he had been assaulted with a stick by William Jones, in Half Nichol Street in September 1891. The constable contradicted himself in his account of events leading up to the assault and was told to shut up and sit down by the clerk of court and by his own police inspector. The magistrate accepted instead the version given by the defendant's mother and sister – that the constable had been drinking alcohol in a court off Half

Nichol Street and had struck a child who was staring at him, with Jones coming to rescue the child.

Some magistrates feared that the Met was abusing the powers that had been granted to it under the 1871 Prevention of Crimes Act (known in the poorest parts of the East End as 'The Fly Paper', because once caught on it, it was almost impossible to get off). The Act allowed the imprisonment for 12 months' hard labour of anyone found guilty of being "a suspected person", loitering in the street, who had at least two previous convictions.

Many English liberty-loving Justices of the Peace distrusted certain officers who seemed to show little understanding of the rights of the individual and who seemed to be persecuting those who already had 'form'. The Old Nichol appeared to many to be a happy hunting ground for some unscrupulous PCs – though allegations were being made by members of





Members of the Met outside their station c1890. Officers were often asked to perform tasks way beyond their statutory duties

the public right across London of wrongful arrest and unnecessary use of force by the Met.

However, alongside these worrying incidents, there are plenty of reports that confirm that police officers were called upon to perform a range of tasks within the community that had nothing to do with the prevention or investigation of crime. When a serious accident occurred or a severe medical condition developed within the Nichol, the police were often the first contact the public would make in an age when medical assistance could be hard to secure or prohibitively expensive. Coroners' inquiry reports and local newspapers make it clear that where a doctor defaulted in his duty, it was the police the public would turn to. When 77-year-old Rebecca Fitt of 21 Old Nichol Street fell ill with bronchitis on a January night in 1892, and the local physician failed to turn up as requested by Fitt's neighbour and her common-law husband, it was a police officer they called in off the street, just in time to see Fitt die. And

## How criminal was the Nichol?

The Nichol looked, smelt and sounded bad – but criminal mayhem was not the norm on its streets. And far from being a police no-go area, as East End legend had it, patrols were frequent: what's more, five police officers chose to live within the slum.

While the written record can never reflect the true state of crime, it is nevertheless clear that the dreary bulk of police and magistrates' records of criminal activity in the Nichol in the 1870s, 1880s and early 1890s concerns drunk-and-disorderlies, fights between man and wife, missing dogs, the ill treatment of birds in the nearby Club Row animal market, parental failure to comply with compulsory child vaccination and school attendance orders, and pub-licensing contraventions.

For what it's worth, the police superintendent of J Division, Bethnal Green, compiled a detailed breakdown of arrests made within the Nichol in the year ending 31 July 1890 – see right.

### Total arrests: 214

Drunk and disorderly: 72

Assaults upon police: 35

Stabbing: 1

Wounding: 1

Indecent assault: 3

Assaults on a wife: 7

Assaults on women: 9

Attempted suicide: 2

Burglary: 1

Desertion of children: 1

Gambling: 33

Stealing: 14

Pickpocketing: 4

Receiving stolen property: 1

Willful damage: 2

Unlawful possession: 8

Other: 20





Shoppers pose for the camera outside a stall on Brick Lane in London's poor East End, 1895

the same constable was asked medical questions at the coroner's inquiry.

The police were also heavily relied upon following domestic violence incidents, of which there were all too many in the Nichol. The Associate Institute for Improving and Enforcing the Laws for the Protection of Women and Children was an innovative, foresighted (though inelegantly named) body formed in 1843 to help women prosecute violent paterfamilias. This was a controversial matter, as family life in these years was largely felt to be off limits to the state and the law. The Institute relied on police officers to help bring about convictions for domestic assaults – just as, much later in the century, the diligence and compassion of many police officers assisted the NSPCC in the battle against child cruelty. From 1889 onwards, the police would be granted greater powers to intervene where abuse and neglect of children was suspected within the family home.

The children of the Nichol had a complex relationship with the police. As the Leary and

## *In the Nichol, miniature battles between beat coppers and locals were not unusual*

Jones cases mentioned earlier indicate, hostility could exist between slum children and police constables. But East Ender Arthur Harding recalled that, as a small child, on more than one occasion he had got lost, wandering away from the Nichol, and that the kindly officers at nearby Kingsland Road police station would pick him up, feed him bread and jam and let him play with the toys kept at the station especially for missing infants. "They used to make a big fuss of you there," recalled Arthur. "They knew that you was hungry."

To sum up, the very same documentary

records that paint a negative picture of the police in the Old Nichol also offer glimpses of its opposite: a brave and humane force that willingly acted beyond its statutory duties.

The only conclusion to be drawn from the slum, then, is the somewhat bland one that while certain officers were a disgrace to their uniform, others were invaluable assets to an often desperate and troubled community. **H**

Sarah Wise's books include *The Blackest Streets: The Life and Death of a Victorian Slum* (Vintage, 2009)

### DISCOVER MORE

#### BOOKS

- **Crime and Society in England, 1750-1900** by Clive Emsley (Pearson, 2005)
- **The Great British Bobby: A history of British policing from 1829 to the present** by Clive Emsley (Quercus, 2010)
- **Crime and Industrial Society in the Nineteenth Century** by JJ Tobias (Penguin, 1967)



# FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE

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# NURSING BY NUMBERS

She transformed frontline nursing but, explains **Stephen Halliday**, Nightingale also used her passion for statistics to campaign for better food, hygiene and clothing for soldiers and the poor





“Were I a man of wealth, I would see that Florence Nightingale was commemorated not only as the ‘lady of the lamp’ but by the activities of the ‘Passionate Statistician’”

This judgment was made by Florence’s friend Karl Pearson (1857–1936), himself a pioneer in the application of statistics to social problems as a professor at University College, London. His view was confirmed by Florence’s cousin Hilary Bonham-Carter, who wrote that: “However exhausted Florence might be, the sight of long columns of figures was perfectly reviving for her”. Florence herself wrote that statistics were “the cipher by which we may read the thoughts of God”. Her precocious interest in the subject, which she mostly taught herself, dismayed her father who considered the subject unfeminine. Florence first applied her mathematical skills when she trained as a nurse at Kaiserswerth in Germany, tracing relationships between illnesses and such factors as age, sex and poverty.

Throughout her life, her gift for mathematics was often to be a source of frustration for her because of the ignorance of those whom she sought to influence. In 1891 she wrote that: “Though the great majority of cabinet ministers, of the army, of the executive, of both Houses of Parliament, have received a university education, what has that university education taught them of the practical application of statistics?” In despair at the innumeracy which she encountered, she devised a ‘coxcomb’ diagram “to affect through the eyes what we may fail to convey through their word-proof ears”. It was an early and sophisticated pie chart.

When she reached Scutari, the base for casualties from the Crimea, Florence calculated that deaths from disease were seven times those arising in battle (see diagram) and used the information to campaign for better food, hygiene and clothing for the troops. She persuaded the government to commission Isambard Kingdom Brunel to design a prefabricated hospital to be shipped out to Scutari, though it arrived after hostilities had ceased.

Upon returning to England, Florence continued her work and calculated that, even in times of peace, mortality among supposedly healthy soldiers, aged 25–35 and living in barracks, was double that of the

civilian population. She wrote to Sir John McNeill (who was conducting the enquiry into the mismanagement of the Crimean campaign): “It is as criminal to have a mortality of 17, 19 and 20 per thousand in the line, artillery and guards, when that in civil life is only 11 per thousand, as it would be to take 1,100 men out upon Salisbury Plain and shoot them.”

Florence’s most important ally in reducing mortality among Queen Victoria’s subjects, and particularly among her soldiers, was the

queen herself. The welfare of her soldiers was a matter of great interest to Victoria, who had written to Florence at Scutari, sending her a medal inscribed “Blessed are the merciful” and asking Florence both to send reports directly to her and to visit her at Balmoral immediately upon her return.

Florence’s visits to Balmoral made a strong impression upon the queen, who wrote: “We have made Miss Nightingale’s acquaintance and are delighted and very much struck by her great gentleness and simplicity and wonderfully clear and comprehensive head. I wish we had her at the War Office.” After lengthy interviews with Victoria and Prince Albert, Florence wrote to her uncle that: “The queen wished me to remain to see Lord Panmure [minister of war] here rather than in London because she thinks it more likely that something might be done with him here, with her to back me.” To put Panmure in the ‘right’ frame of mind, Victoria wrote to him: “Lord Panmure will be much gratified and struck with Miss Nightingale”.

Florence made good and continuing use of this connection. When she was dissatisfied with the reaction she received from politicians and officials to her reports, statistics, charts and diagrams, she wrote to Victoria or Albert and received replies such as the one that greeted her analysis of the demographic consequences of the plan to move St Thomas’s hospital from London Bridge to its new home on the Albert Embankment. Her report on the subject to Prince Albert received the assurance that the matter “has received the immediate attention any communication from you would be sure to command”.

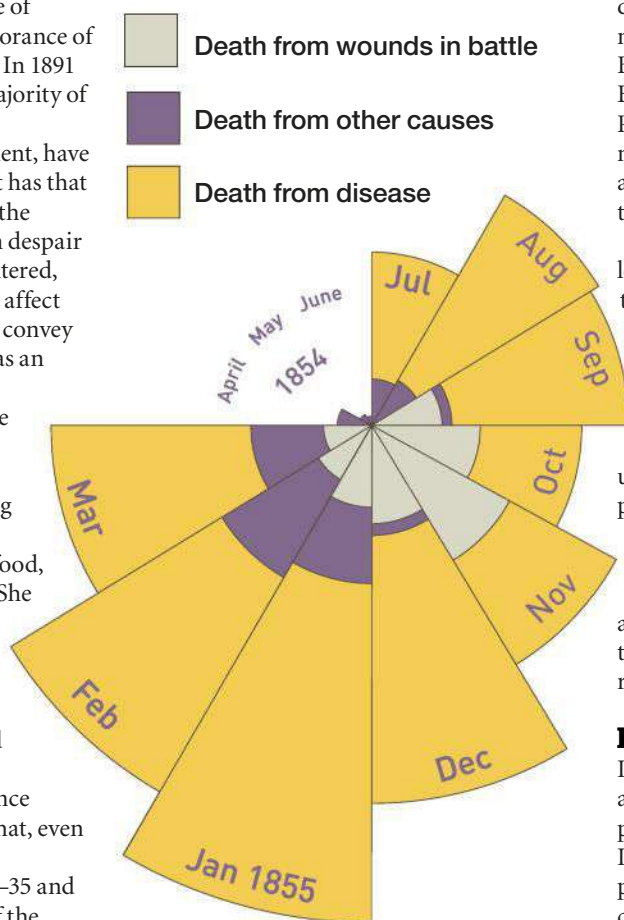
Florence’s interview with Lord Panmure led to the creation of a royal commission on the health of the British army. She bombarded the commissioners with questions about the relationship between the death rates in barracks and such factors as the provision of water, sewerage, ventilation, accommodation and food, using a ‘coxcomb’ chart to press home her points. She used her contacts to ensure that her views received publicity in newspapers.

The commission reported in 1863, accepting most of her recommendations and Florence then used her royal connections to ensure that they were put into effect. Death rates fell by 75 per cent.

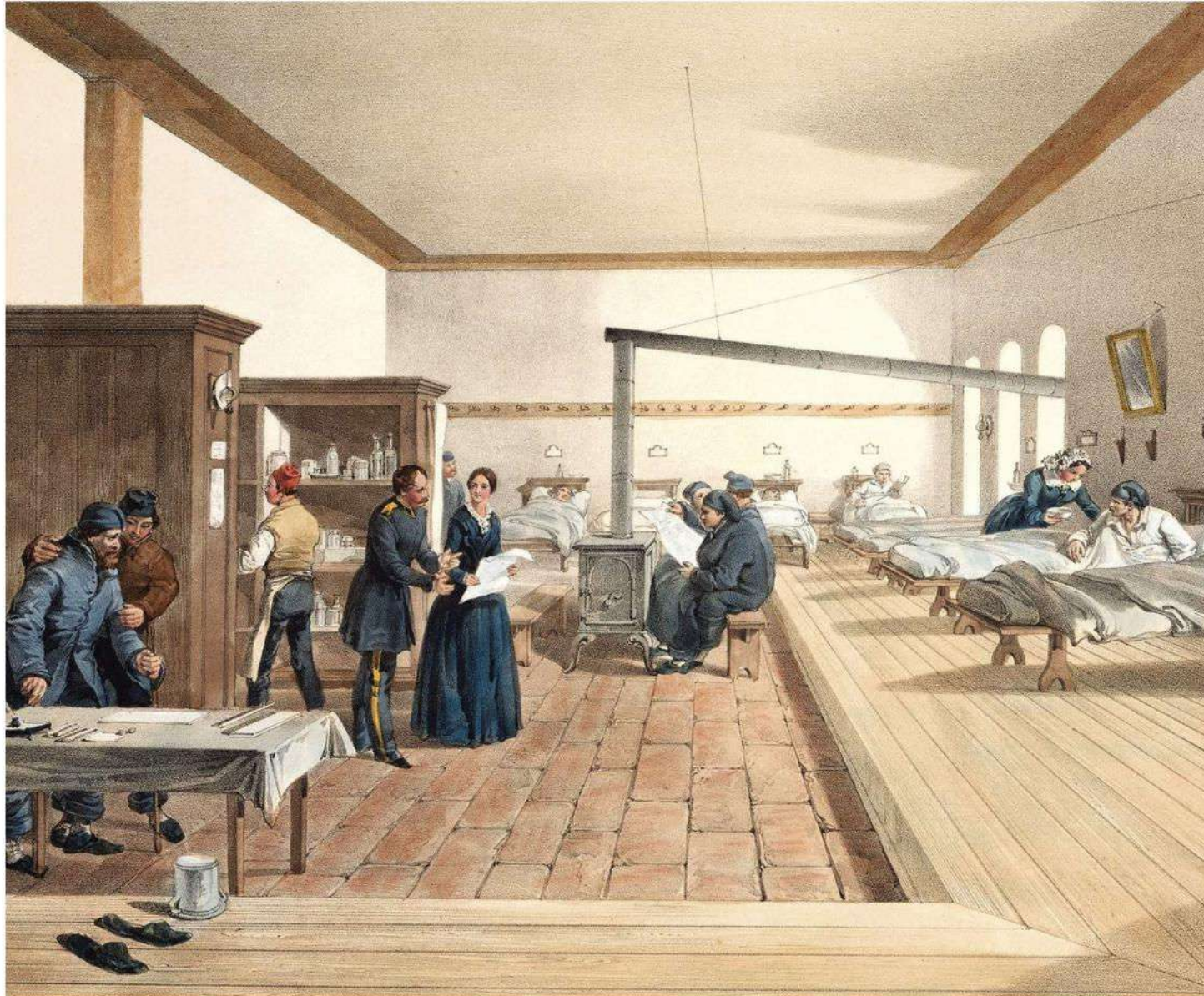
## Hospital statistics

In the meantime, Florence had turned her attention to the welfare of the civilian population. In 1860 she attended the International Statistical Congress and read a paper in which she proposed a scheme for the collection of “uniform hospital statistics”,

**Nightingale’s diagram of the mortality rates in the British army in the Crimea, from April 1854 to March 1855. It demonstrates that deaths from diseases far outweighed those caused by ‘wounds in battle’**







An 1856 print shows Nightingale in a hospital in Scutari, Turkey, the base for casualties from the fighting in the Crimea

leading the delegates to decide that: “Miss Nightingale’s scheme should be conveyed to all governments represented”. She argued for the inclusion in the 1861 census of questions on “persons suffering from sickness or infirmity on census day” so that she could analyse the data and make a “connection between the health and the dwellings of the population”. The census commissioners refused her request on the grounds that the terms “sickness or infirmity” were too vague to elicit reliable information. In 1858 she became the first woman to be elected as a fellow of the (later Royal) Statistical Society. Fifteen years passed before another woman was elected: the almost equally formidable Baroness Angela Burdett-Coutts.

Florence’s campaigns continued to the end of her life. In 1891, as another census approached, she wrote a letter to the eugenicist Francis Galton. The letter was headed ‘A Scheme of Social Physics [ie Social Science] and Teaching’. It proposed the collection of data on four subjects (the letters are hers):

“A. The effects of education: What proportion

of children forget their whole education on leaving school?

B. Punishment: The deterrent or encouraging effect upon crime of being in gaol.

C. Workhouses: What is the proportion of names which from generation to generation appear in workhouse records?

D. India: Whether the population there are growing richer or poorer.”

In the same year, 1891, she corresponded with Francis Galton and Benjamin Jowett, master of Balliol College, Oxford, about her intention to bequeath £2,000 to Oxford University to endow a professorship of statistics, which would have been the first in the world. She later revoked the decision

*Her love of maths dismayed her father, who thought the subject ‘unfeminine’*

because she was not convinced that the money would not end up “in endowing some bacillus or microbes”, by which she meant something of no consequence.

She didn’t get everything right. Her analysis of the 19th-century cholera epidemics convinced her that it was caused by foul air, not polluted water, and her influence was such that she probably hampered the fight against the disease. But, despite such miscalculations, she was certainly a “passionate statistician”. ■

Dr Stephen Halliday is author of *The Great Filth: The War Against Disease in Victorian England* (Sutton, 2007)

#### DISCOVER MORE

##### BOOK

► **Florence Nightingale: The Woman and her Legend** by Mark Bostridge (Penguin, 2009)

##### PLACE TO VISIT

► Explore Nightingale’s life and legacy at the **Florence Nightingale Museum**, London. [www.florence-nightingale.co.uk](http://www.florence-nightingale.co.uk)



# A GRAVE



A family mourns the death of a loved one in Frank Holl's 1872 painting, *I Am the Resurrection and the Life (The Village Funeral)*. By this time, corpses in overcrowded cemeteries were deemed "injurious to the health of the living"

BRIDGEMAN



# DILEMMA

A Victorian-era painting depicting a man and a young girl in a cemetery. The man, on the left, is dressed in a dark, worn coat and trousers, holding a hat. He is looking down at the girl. The girl, on the right, is wearing a dark dress and a bonnet, looking off to the side. They are standing on a path in a cemetery with several tombstones in the background. The scene is dimly lit, suggesting a somber or melancholic mood.

By 1840, London's cemeteries were full to bursting, smelling foul and posing a serious health risk to the living. **Ruth Levitt** reveals how the Victorians addressed the problem of disposing of the dead



### French blueprint

A view of Paris's Père Lachaise cemetery in 1815. This landscaped, 110-acre 'natural' park, with the capacity for hundreds of thousands of burials, influenced cemetery designers on the other side of the English Channel



“I am sure the moral sensibilities of many delicate minds must sicken to witness the heaped soil, saturated and blackened with human remains and fragments of the dead...the splash of water is heard from the graves, as the coffins descend, producing a shudder in every mourner.”

Reverend John Blackburn's chilling words appeared in a report on burial practices in towns, prepared by Edwin Chadwick for the home secretary in 1843. Deaths were rising, especially in overcrowded and squalid urban neighbourhoods, where cholera, tuberculosis, diphtheria, smallpox and typhus were major killers.

Most of the old burial grounds were full to overflowing, or soon would be. The dense mix of houses, shops, taverns, factories and workplaces around them meant they had no adjacent space for expansion. Some parishes found additional land elsewhere. St Martin-in-the-Fields in Trafalgar Square used a Drury Lane cemetery and opened another, three miles north in Camden Town.

Gravediggers adopted desperate measures. Shallow burials and communal pits proliferated; coffins were removed soon after burial to save space. Sometimes there was no coffin, and quicklime was spread over corpses to hasten decomposition.

The smells were dreadful, and upkeep of

the burial grounds was often minimal or absent. Body snatchers could easily dig up newly buried remains to sell to medical schools that needed cadavers for anatomy students to dissect. Professor Knox in Edinburgh even paid the infamous murderers Burke and Hare around £8 a corpse (approximately £550 today) for each of their 17 victims in 1828.

Chadwick, secretary to the Poor Law Commission, argued that the “putrid emanations” from corpses in overcrowded burial grounds and vaults were “injurious to the health of the living”. Charles Dickens, who knew Chadwick, fictionalised the graveyard at Drury Lane in *Bleak House* (1853) as “a hemmed-in churchyard, pestiferous and

obscene, whence malignant diseases are communicated to the bodies of our dear brothers and sisters who have not departed”.

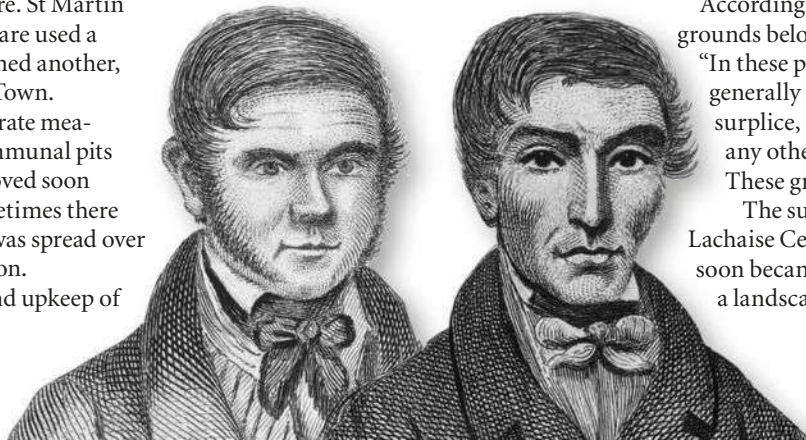
Dickens also spoke out against ostentatious and costly funerals and extravagant displays of mourning. By the mid-19th century, these had become the norm and, worse still, the poor were emulating them at a ruinous cost. These did “no honour to the memory of the dead, did great dishonour to the living, as inducing them to associate the most solemn of human occasions with unmeaning mummeries, dishonest debt, profuse waste, and bad example in an utter oblivion of responsibility”.

A Leeds doctor told Chadwick that labourers delayed burying deceased relatives because they could not afford the undertakers' charges. It was not unusual “to see a corpse laid out in a room where eight to twelve persons have to sleep, and sometimes even both sleep and eat”.

According to Chadwick, the most crowded grounds belonged to private undertakers: “In these places an uneducated man generally acts as minister, puts on a surplice, and reads the church service, or any other service that may be called for. These grounds are morally offensive.”

The successful, commercially run Père Lachaise Cemetery in Paris (opened 1804) soon became an influential model: a landscaped, 110-acre ‘natural’ park with

**A deadly trade**  
The murderers Burke (left) and Hare were paid £8 for the bodies of each of their victims. Yet many body snatchers simply dug up newly buried cadavers from cemeteries





*Communal pits proliferated. Coffins were removed soon after burial to save space. Sometimes quicklime was spread over corpses to hasten decomposition*

capacity for hundreds of thousands of burials in graves, tombs, catacombs, vaults and an ossuary, with funerary sculpture and horticulture that visitors could admire.

### Garden cemeteries

In 1832 parliament authorised the General Cemetery Company to raise speculative share capital to build a new, large, park-like cemetery at Kensal Green, a London suburb north-west of Paddington. It opened the following year, occupying 48 acres. Soon, another six privately owned cemeteries were established around London: at West Norwood in 1837, Highgate in 1839, Abney Park, Brompton and Nunhead in 1840 and Tower Hamlets in 1841.

In 1843 John Claudius Loudon explained in his book on the design and management of cemeteries that the main purpose of a burial ground was to dispose of the remains of the dead “in such a manner as that their decomposition, and return to the earth from which they sprung, shall not prove injurious to the living; either by affecting their health, or shocking their feelings, opinions, or prejudices”. The secondary purpose was, or ought to be “the improvement of the moral sentiments and general taste of all classes, and more especially of the great masses of society”. Loudon advocated single, sealed, biodegradable coffins buried deep in single graves, never re-opened, in new landscaped cemeteries on well-drained suburban sites.

Meanwhile, in 1852 the Metropolitan Burial Act outlawed any further burials in central London, and by 1884 the Disused Burial Grounds Act prohibited burial grounds being built on.

### Battlefield dead

Part of the overcrowding problem stemmed, to a degree, from the fact that religious leaders, parliament and public opinion were slow to accept alternatives. Most forms of Christianity abhorred cremation, regarding it as contrary to belief in the resurrection of

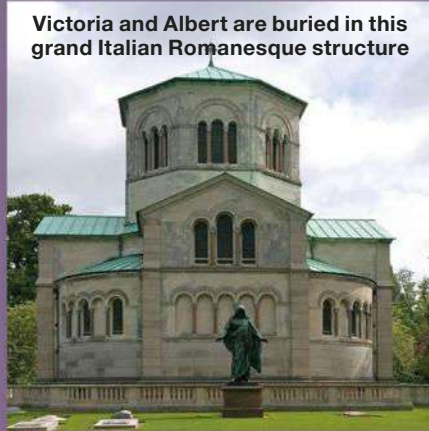
## The glorious dead

Where the great and good rest in peace

### Frogmore Royal Mausoleum ↓

This is a burial place fit for an empress. When Queen Victoria and Prince Albert planned their own royal mausoleum, they saw to it that no expense was spared: the Italian Romanesque building boasts a richly decorated interior and two granite sarcophagi bearing the queen and prince's marble effigies. Outside is a royal burial ground with over 30 graves, including those of Victoria's servant John Brown, the former Edward VIII and his wife, Wallis Simpson.

Victoria and Albert are buried in this grand Italian Romanesque structure



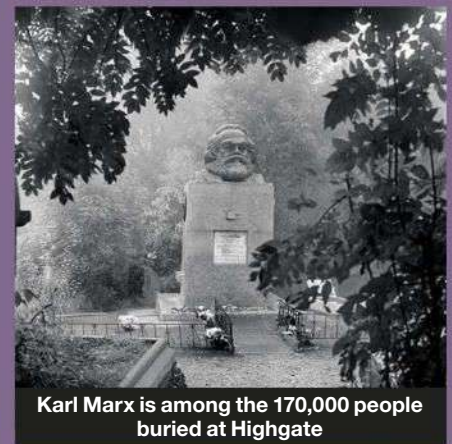
### Westminster Abbey ↓

The abbey was the burial place of choice for most English and British monarchs from Henry III in 1272 all the way through to George II in 1760. Lying with this long list of royals at the 1,000-year-old site are such luminaries as Charles Dickens, Geoffrey Chaucer, Isaac Newton and Charles Darwin. The abbey also houses the grave of the Unknown Warrior (below), an unidentified British soldier killed in the First World War.



### Kensal Green cemetery →

John Claudius Loudon, Isambard Kingdom Brunel, William Makepeace Thackeray and WH Smith are among the 250,000 people interred in this west London cemetery. Kensal Green was opened in 1833 as the first of the capital's seven 'garden cemeteries', and has since expanded to 77 acres bordering Harrow Road, Ladbroke Grove and the Grand Union Canal. A cremation, ashes plot and standard burial at the cemetery will now set you back about £650, £3,170 and £12,200 respectively.



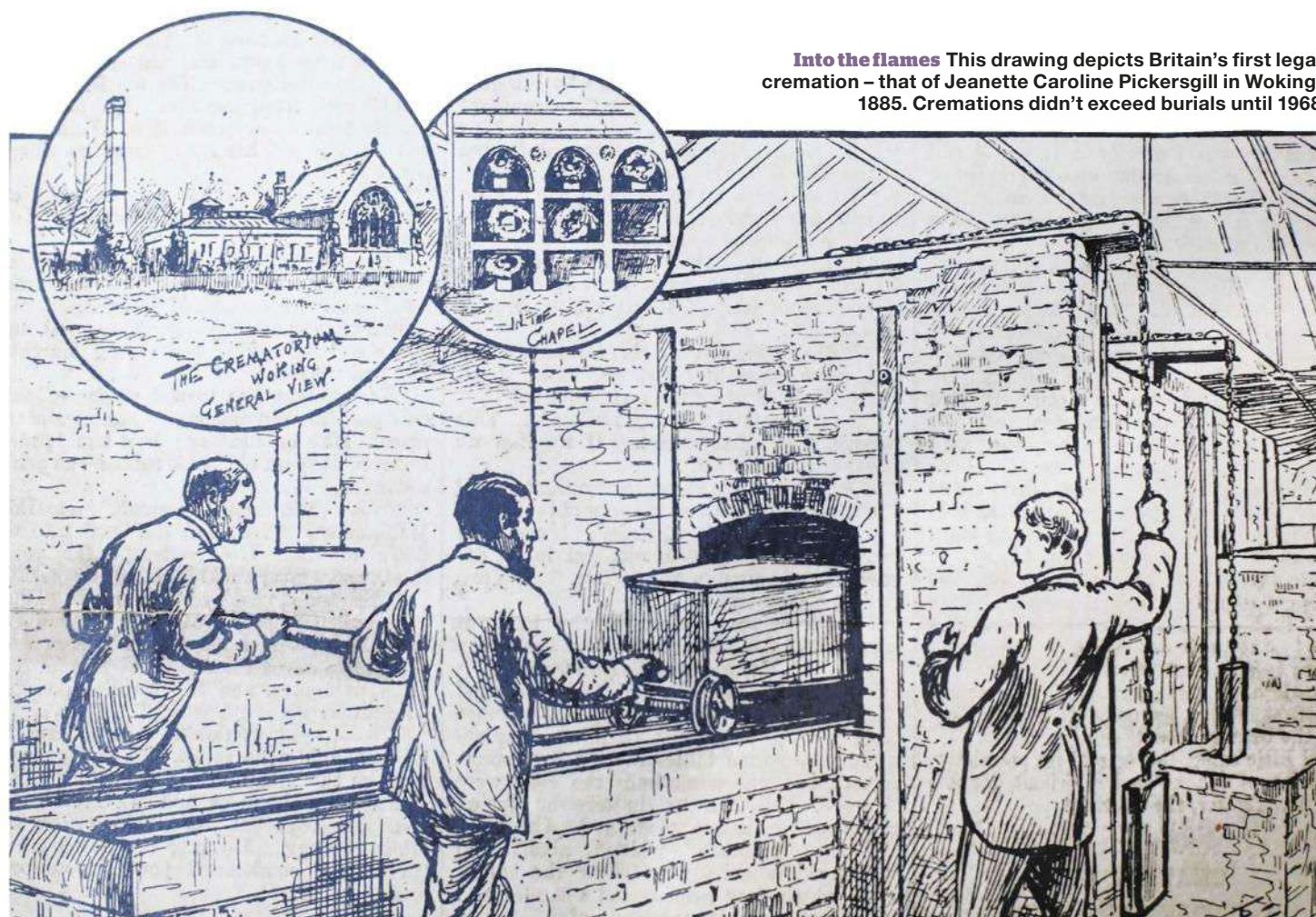
Karl Marx is among the 170,000 people buried at Highgate

### Highgate cemetery ↑

This fashionable north London cemetery, designed by the architect Stephen Geary, was opened in 1839. Back then, the 17-acre site cost £3,500; today, the expanded 37-acre plot would be worth billions. Highgate houses more than 170,000 individuals, buried in 53,000 graves – among them Karl Marx, George Eliot, Michael Faraday and Charles Cruft.



**Into the flames** This drawing depicts Britain's first legal cremation – that of Jeanette Caroline Pickersgill in Woking, 1885. Cremations didn't exceed burials until 1968



the body. The Roman Catholic church actually banned cremation between 1886 and 1963, only tolerating the burning of the battlefield dead. Nowadays, Orthodox Judaism, Greek and Russian Orthodox Christianity, Islam and Zoroastrianism prohibit cremation, while Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism and Jainism mandate it.

In 1822 the poet Shelley drowned at sea off the coast of northern Italy and his body, washed up on the shore, was cremated, to conform with Italy's quarantine rules. Serious debate about cremation began in Italy in the 1850s, when doctors published articles making the sanitary case for cremation as an alternative to burial.

A model of a furnace designed by one of them was exhibited at the International Exposition in Vienna in 1873, impressing a prominent British doctor, Sir Henry Thompson. He published an article in the *Contemporary Review* in January 1874 entitled 'The Treatment of the Body After Death', and founded a group that became the Cremation Society of England (now of Great Britain). They raised funds and bought a site for a crematorium at Woking from the London Necropolis Company, but local opposition and continuing uncertainty about the legality of cremation delayed further progress. The

*John Claudius Loudon advocated single, sealed, biodegradable coffins buried deep in single graves on well-drained suburban sites*

main objection was that cremation could destroy evidence of crimes.

A landmark judgment at Cardiff Assizes on 15 February 1884 established that cremating a body was legal provided it did not cause nuisance or offence to others. Judge Sir James Stephen acquitted William Price, a Welsh doctor and Druid charged with attempting to cremate the body of his five-month-old son on an open hillside at Llantrisant. Protected by this judgment, Woking crematorium opened in 1885, accepting only bodies of legally certified deaths. Supporters of the Cremation Society introduced a bill in parliament to underpin the new legal position, but the government and opposition defeated it. That didn't stop crematoria opening in Manchester, Glasgow, Liverpool, Hull and Darlington between 1892 and 1901.

In 1902, the Cremation Act made its way through parliament. In that same year, around 450 people were cremated, less than 1 per cent of annual deaths. Cremations finally exceeded burials in 1968 and, by the centenary of the act, 243 crematoria were disposing of over 430,000 bodies – more than 71 per cent of all deaths.

Since then, interest in 'natural burials', where bodies are interred in a manner that does not slow decomposition, and allows the body to recycle naturally, has grown fast – so much so, in fact, that local authorities are increasingly providing 'green' areas within traditional cemeteries for environmentally friendly burials. It seems that the days of shallow burials and quicklime are fading fast. **H**

**Dr Ruth Levitt** is a visiting senior research fellow in political economy at King's College London

### DISCOVER MORE

#### WEBSITE

► To locate a grave of an ancestor or someone famous, go to [findagrave.com](http://findagrave.com)

#### BOOK

► **Dirty Old London: The Victorian Fight Against Filth** by Lee Jackson (Yale University Press, 2015)



# Elizabeth Gaskell

1810–65

Novelist and short story writer whose broad range of works included gritty and shocking ‘issue’ fiction, as well as several comic tales and ghost stories

**“H**ow deep might be the romance in the lives of some of those who elbowed me daily in the busy streets of the town in which I resided. I had always felt a deep sympathy with the careworn men, who looked as if doomed to struggle through their lives in strange alternations between work and want.”

– preface to *Mary Barton*

Elizabeth Gaskell was one of the finest storytellers of the Victorian era – an immensely versatile writer whose output of novels and short stories ranged from historical dramas and ghost stories to whimsical tales of rural and small town life. There were also more disturbing stories of life among the poor, tales of poverty, illegitimacy and prostitution. Her best-known ‘social’ novels include *Mary Barton* (1848), *Ruth* (1853) and *North and South* (1855).

Elizabeth Cleghorn Stevenson was born in London, a daughter of William Stevenson, a civil servant and author. The family were Unitarians, with a strong belief in social duty, but after her mother’s early death, Elizabeth spent most of her childhood living with her aunt, Hannah Lumb, in Knutsford, Cheshire, as well as going to boarding schools. Her childhood experiences, combined with her father’s remarriage and her later visits to her large extended family around the country, would provide useful material on family problems and tragedy in her later writing.

While Knutsford would be the fictional *Cranford* in her affectionate satirical novella on provincial life (initially serialised in Dickens’s *Household Words*, 1851–53), it was her role as a minster’s wife that informed her more gritty work. She married William Gaskell, assistant minister at the Cross Street Chapel, Manchester in 1832. This was when social and economic problems abounded and

soon the Chartists and Anti-Corn Law League were active on the streets. She assisted her husband in charity work, bringing her into direct contact with some of Manchester’s poorest people.

As a Victorian wife, she also now embarked on a succession of pregnancies, and it was the loss of a son, William, aged nine months, in 1845 that drove her into a deep depression which her husband encouraged her to address by writing. She had already published a number of pieces, but the tragedy seems to have marked the effective start of her novel-writing career.

*Mary Barton* was initially published anonymously and was well received by many, but hated by the Manchester business community.

*Ruth*, the story of a teenage seamstress who is seduced and has an illegitimate child (a narrative based on a real girl Gaskell had visited in prison), caused even more uproar; members of William Gaskell’s congregation burned a copy.

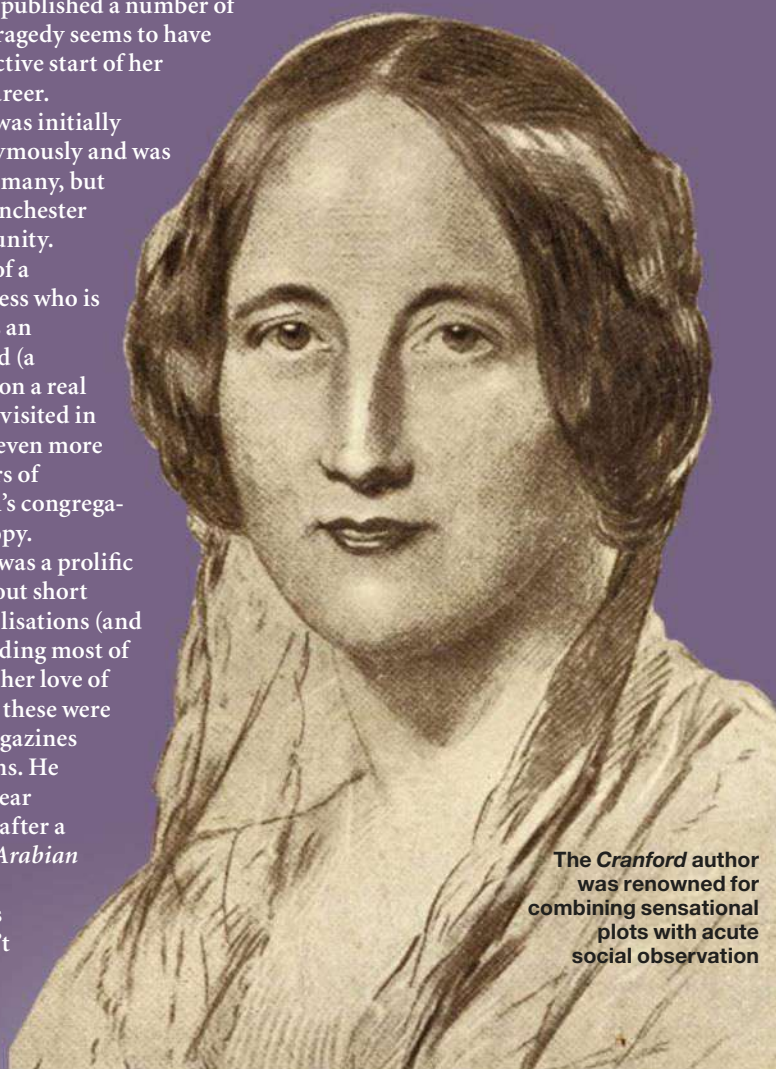
‘Mrs Gaskell’ was a prolific writer, turning out short stories and serialisations (and apparently spending most of the proceeds on her love of travel). Many of these were published in magazines edited by Dickens. He called her his “dear Scheherazade” (after a character from *Arabian Nights*), but the relationship was tetchy; she didn’t like him editing

*It was the loss of a son, aged ten months, that drove her into a deep depression which her husband encouraged her to address by writing*

her copy, and he didn’t like her constantly breaking deadlines.

In person she was chatty and extrovert – a great lover of company, whose home at Plymouth Grove was a salon for the intelligentsia of Manchester, and attracted visitors from all over the country. Among Gaskell’s friends were Charlotte Brontë, Thomas Carlyle, John Ruskin, Florence Nightingale and Charles Kingsley. **H**

Words: Eugene Byrne



The *Cranford* author was renowned for combining sensational plots with acute social observation



# AT TWO AND AT



GETTY IMAGES



# RK PLAY

## ◆ **Shop 'til you drop**

Inventing the Victorian Christmas

## ◆ **The age of opportunity**

The upside of industrialisation

## ◆ **Striking a light**

The matchwomen's strike

## ◆ **Seaside love affair**

The Victorian holiday boom

## ◆ **The Chartist movement**

The push for political reform



A Victorian advert promotes Christmas shopping, which rose to prominence thanks to the increasing resources of the middle class. Shoppers' purses were opened by seductive shop window displays







# CHRISTMAS AND CONSUMERISM

## *Shop 'til you drop*

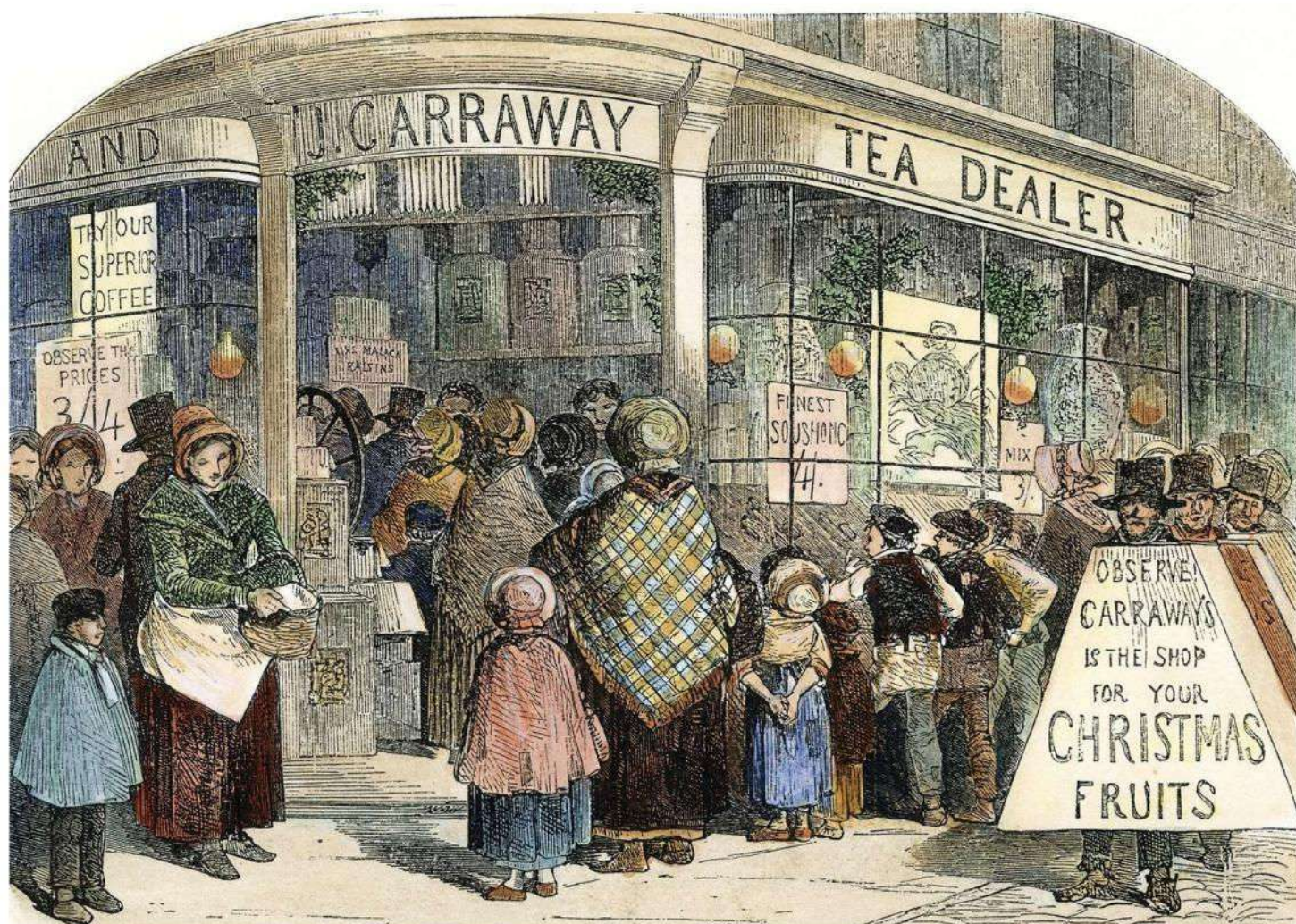
The Victorians were the first to fully exploit Christmas for its commercial opportunities. **Mark Connelly** looks at how they turned the season of goodwill into an orgy of consumption

**N**owadays it is often said by both clergy and members of the general public alike that Christmas is no more than an orgy of consumerism, and that the message of Christmas has been drowned in a frenzy of competitive present-buying and consumption on an almost obscene level. However, this complaint is by no means new. In fact, it stretches back to the last quarter of the 19th century, a time when many of us believe Christmas, infused by the spirit of Dickens, was more homely, wholesome and spiritual.

Another much repeated 'fact' about Christmas is that it was invented by the Victorians, and Charles Dickens in particular. While there is no doubting the fact that the Victorians, partly inspired by Dickens, were fascinated by the celebration of Christmas, they didn't invent it. Rather they reinvigorated it and brought together the many Christmas customs of Britain and threw themselves into the season in a way not seen before.

Being a nation of manufacturers, industrialists and shopkeepers, it was not long before Victorians realised that Christmas, with its emphasis on generosity and hospitality, could be exploited for commercial





Christmas shopping in the first half of the 19th century was usually limited to food treats, as in *The Grocer's Shop at Christmas* from 1850

possibilities. With the growth of a department store culture in Britain from the 1870s, the scene was set for a fusion of sentiment and shopping to arrive every year in late November, and it wasn't long before some began to complain.

## Dickensian delights

Buying for Christmas was not entirely a development of the late 19th century, however. Before the late 1870s to early 1880s there was additional purchasing for Christmas, but much of this shopping was centred on exotic and special foods. Gift giving was important, but its general profile was relatively low. In *A Christmas Carol* (1843) Dickens mentions toys bought as children's gifts, but they come a poor second to the heart of early 19th-century Christmas shopping – culinary delights:

"The poulterers' shops were still half open, and the fruiterers' were radiant in their glory. There were great, round, pot-bellied baskets of chestnuts... There were ruddy, brown-faced, broad-girthed Spanish onions... There were pears and apples... there were bunches of grapes... piles of filberts... there were Norfolk pippins... The Grocers'! oh the Grocers'!... the blended scents of tea and coffee... the raisins

were so plentiful and rare, the almonds so extremely white, the sticks of cinnamon... the other spices so delicious, the candied fruits so caked and spotted with molten sugar... the figs were moist and pulpy, ... the French plums blushed in modest tartness... everything was good to eat and in its Christmas dress: [and]... the customers were all so hurried and so eager in the hopeful promise of the day."

Provisions were obviously very important, far more so than the idea of browsing for presents, or the as yet unknown glory of picking Christmas card designs.

But as the number of department stores grew, symbols of an ever greater consumerism, fuelled by the increasing resources of a growing middle class, so did the Christmas shopping obsession. By the end of the century,

*Gordon Selfridge coined the phrase "only X shopping days to Christmas"*

festivities commenced when the shopping season began – no sooner, no later. Advent Sunday, Christmas Eve, the First Night of Christmas, Twelfth Night, the dates by which the church signalled and measured the season, were pushed aside by the new development of mass consumerism. The clarion call of Christmas was being heard earlier and earlier thanks to the desire of retailers to maximise their profits.

A tale in the *Christmas Story-Teller* of 1878 shows how far popular culture took the shop as its calendar: "Christmas was coming. There were indications everywhere. The grocers, the butchers, and fancy emporiums, all proclaimed Christmas was coming".

According to *The Lady's Pictorial* of December 1881, Christmas announced itself through the transformation of shops: "Christmas cards in almost every window, in the companionship of the attractions of the toy-seller, the wares of the draper, the irresistible temptations of the milliner, and of their more legitimate comrades in the show-cases of the stationer – from everywhere have these pretty little tokens of good-will and kindly thoughts been peering-out and seeking the attention of the passer-by." In EM Forster's



*Howards End* (1910), Mrs Wilcox prevails upon Margaret Schlegel to help her with her Christmas shopping: "I thought we would go to Harrod's or the Haymarket Stores... Everything is sure to be there".

One ex-employee of the Bon Marché in Brixton wrote of her memories of the shop in the 1930s: "To many the Bon Marché was always the starting point for Christmas shopping, and this was so for me. The Post Office was in Bon Marché, and so after drawing out some savings, I would start out complete with a list in one hand and a shopping bag in the other".

Department stores had created a new Christmas custom, that of obsessive shopping – and sought new attractions to lure consumers in. In 1888 JP Robert of Stratford, West Ham, unveiled the first Santa's Grotto in his store, and with it he inaugurated a vital Christmas tradition. By the turn of the century all children wanted to sit on Santa's knee, and all store owners wanted to induce their mammas to bring them in.

The desire to entice custom instigated another new tradition – in the increasingly sophisticated art of window-dressing. By the 1880s the great department stores were putting enormous efforts into outshining their rivals' Christmas displays. Peter Jones in Sloane Square made sure that its Christmas window displays gave "one the impression of having been well thought out and carefully planned well in advance".

Gordon Selfridge was one of the great impresarios of Christmas windows. His apprenticeship in Marshall Field of Chicago had given him the keenest eye for glamour

and presentation. Indeed it was Selfridge who coined the phrase "only X shopping days to Christmas".

## Window displays

According to *The Times*, 1923 was a vintage year in the art of Christmas window dressing: "The shop windows everywhere this Christmas show a great advance over former years in the matter of setting and display. Last week long after closing time there were crowds of people who seemed to be 'touring' the great shopping centres, where windows were lighted up to about 10pm".

In November 1924, *The Drapers' Record* paid a visit to F Parsons and Son of Stoke Newington, designers and builders of ship fittings. They were busy working on their latest creation for a Christmas bazaar. A huge mock-up of medieval London was to be built telling the story of Dick Whittington.

The commissioning store was not only getting a pantomime tale, but was also buttressing one of the romances of English history. The children were to enter via a perfect, scale model of the original Aldersgate as it appeared in the 15th century. Just the other side of the gate was the Lord Mayor's Coach which would then take a dozen or so children for a ride up a hill for about one hundred feet.

At this point Father Christmas was to greet them, then they passed by a series of "realistic tableaux depicting in turn a panoramic view of the City, showing St Paul's and Bow Church, with the bells pealing in the distance; the Docks of London, with their old-time ships; the King and Queen at the Palace; the Lord Mayor's Show; and, finally the Banquet in the Guildhall".

There's little doubt that such displays had the desired effect. Massive crowds touring the opulent windows became as much a part of the British Christmas as crackers and plum pudding. As *The Outlook* of December 1898 pointed out, to go Christmas shopping at the end of the 19th century was to throw yourself into "a vortex of would-be buyers". The vortex was described thus:

"In Swan and Edgar's this morning, for example, the hubbub on the staircase was simply deafening. A continual stream of 'sightseers' wended their way up and down... I leave Evan's and retrace my steps as far as Oxford Circus. The windows in Peter Robinson's are so enthralling it seems a pity to go in... I stand for a moment at Marshall and Snelgrove's window, and my feminine heart begins to pine for the beauties behind the glass."

Such was the magnetic pull of the shop windows at Christmas that the crowds

Bob Cratchit and son Tiny Tim, two stars of *A Christmas Carol*



## Dickens and Christmas

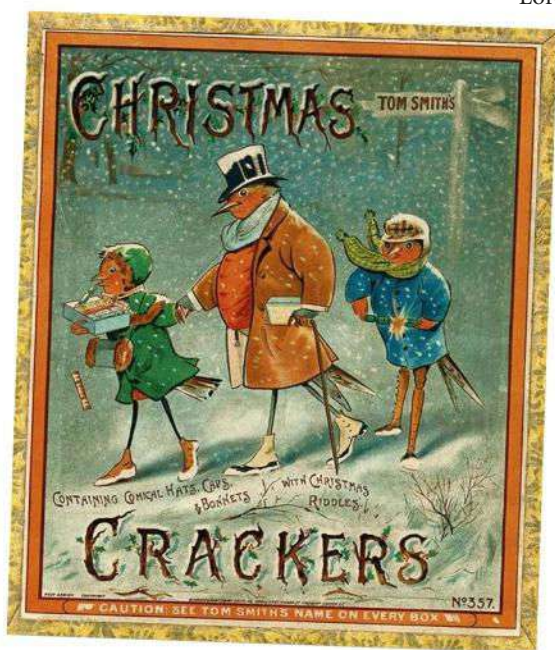
The writer's novels fuelled an already burgeoning interest in the season

Charles Dickens has had an enormous impact on British culture, but it is his association with Christmas that is most pronounced. Published in 1843, *A Christmas Carol* was an immediate smash with the public, and quickly spawned a range of 'pirated' copies forcing Dickens into a number of legal actions to protect his creation. Even as dour a figure as Thomas Carlyle, the Calvinist historian and philosopher, was moved to throw Christmas dinner parties thanks to the inspiration of Dickens's tale. The early cinema quickly latched on and no fewer than nine different film versions had been made by 1914.

The association of Christmas with Dickens started during his lifetime and gathered pace after his death. "Dickens, it may truly be said, is Christmas," said the scholar VH Allemamy, in 1921. However, important though he undoubtedly was, Dickens did not create Christmas. Rather, he reflected a general early 19th-century interest in the season and was part of a widespread, particularly middle-class, desire to reinvigorate ancient customs.

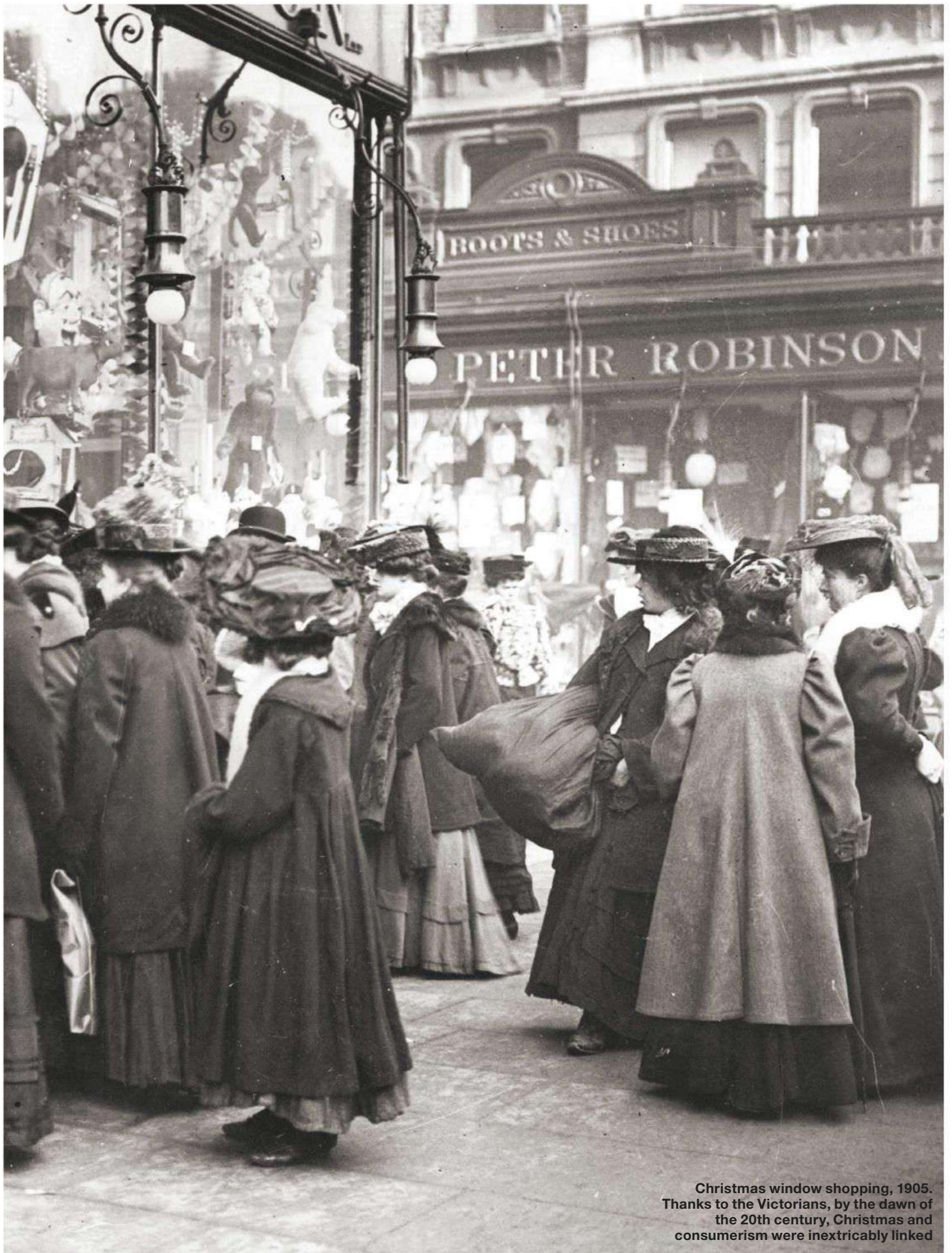
At the time Dickens was writing his now world famous story he could have consulted an ever-burgeoning number of popular histories of Christmas such as TK Hervey's *Book of Christmas* (1836), and his *A History of the Christmas Festival, the New Year and their Peculiar Customs* (1843) and Thomas Wright's *Specimens of Old Carols* (1841). Dickens, being perfectly in-tune with Britain, therefore published his story at precisely the right moment. He was a massive player in a revival that was already under way, but he was not the sole instigator of it.

ALAMY/MARY EVANS



A lid from a box of Christmas crackers boasting hats and riddles, c1870-90





Christmas window shopping, 1905. Thanks to the Victorians, by the dawn of the 20th century, Christmas and consumerism were inextricably linked

GETTY IMAGES



sometimes reached dangerous levels. During Christmas 1909 the police had to be called to Swan and Edgar because the weight of people at the windows on the corner of Great Marlborough Street and Regent Street had entirely blocked the road bringing the traffic to a standstill.

By the 1930s the great retailers had managed to inculcate an atmosphere of expectation. Everybody was keen to know what the designers had dreamt up – and so a self-perpetuating phenomenon had been created. Indeed, the mania was so intense that customers were urged to consider the strain on shopworkers. At Christmas 1898 *The Drapers' Record* urged all shoppers to buy early in order to make life easier for shop assistants. Writing to *The Times* in December 1913, the chairman of the Early Closing Association stated that: “within a few weeks Christmas will be upon us, and those bent on Christmas shopping can in great degree relieve this strain by making their purchases – so far as possible – early in the day and early in the month”.

### Royal examples

The great and the good added their weight to this campaign. In 1923 *The Times* noted that: “The Queen and Princess Mary, Viscount Lascelles, have done a considerable portion of their shopping already. They began the buying of toys (of which both make large purchases each year) some weeks ago, and last week the Queen did a good deal of general buying, and thus set a good example to the rest of London.”

But this creeping commercialism, which seemed to dominate Christmas more with every passing year, was not without its critics, and was satirised brilliantly by George and Weedon Grossmith in *Mr Pooter and his Diary of a Nobody* (1892).

Christmas finds Mr Pooter having to buy a good many cards as a result of his “going out in Society and increasing the number of our friends”. He went to shop in Smirkson’s in the Strand, nominally a drapers, but “this year have turned out everything in the shop and devoted the whole place to the sale of Christmas cards”. But the industry of Christmas cards had already taken on a coarse attitude, as the fastidious Pooter was about to find out.

“I had to buy more and pay more than intended. Unfortunately I did not examine them all, and when I got home I discovered a vulgar card with a picture of a fat nurse with two babies, one black and the other white, and the words: ‘We wish Pa a Merry Christmas.’ I tore up the card and threw it away”. He is equally disgusted by his son’s habit of scribbling a higher price on the corner of each card, so people will think he has paid much more.



Miniature Christmas shops, such as this butcher’s, were prized as Victorian toys

## Christmas shopping

Each department store had a tempting festive atmosphere

The Christmas season in one of the great Victorian department stores such as Whiteley’s of Bayswater or the Glasgow Polytechnic would have been a truly wondrous sight.

Store managers took enormous pride in the vivacity of their Christmas displays. Huge Christmas trees often dominated the main entrance hall, strung with bells, candles and flags. The prevalence of the flags of the United Kingdom and the wider British Empire reveal the way Christmas was intimately associated with patriotism – something that was further reflected in the products stocked for Christmas. The toy departments were laden with lead soldiers, toy warships and military uniforms. In 1888, the London store Shoolbred’s displayed “an Egyptian camel corps similar to that which Wolseley used in the Soudan”, while across town Barker & Co were specialising in boys’ military suits with “arms and armour complete”. Girls were offered a huge range of dolls’ houses, and accessories including prams.

The expansion of the empire also meant that exotic luxuries such as dates and figs were stocked alongside large selections of port wines and Madeira, all of which pandered to the British sweet tooth. Being a people obsessed with innovation, the Victorians loved to shop for the latest gadgets including corkscrews, pen-knives and portable grooming sets. With shopworkers’ costs relatively low, stores employed large numbers of assistants, ensuring a shopper was indulged and flattered into parting with every penny.

EM Forster explored the link between this new commercial Britain and Christmas in *Howards End*, first published in 1910. For him it was almost as if it was impossible to come close to the true heart of Christmas, and the English Christmas especially, in the commercial excesses of London’s department stores. He noted that the character of Margaret in the novel “felt the grotesque impact of the unseen upon the seen, and saw issuing from a forgotten manger at Bethlehem this torrent of coins and toys. Vulgarly reigned”.

## At Christmas 1898 The Drapers’ Record urged all shoppers to buy early in order to make life easier for shop assistants

In Wynyard Browne’s 1950 play, *The Holly and the Ivy*, the Reverend Martin Gregory bemoans the fact that the true meaning of Christmas had utterly disappeared over the years. “The brewers and the retail-traders have got hold of it. It’s all eating and drinking and givin’ each other knick-knacks”. It was a condemnation of the season that many could identify with.

The Second World War and the austerity years of the late 1940s and early 1950s put the brakes on the commercialisation of Christmas, but certainly did not bring it to a halt altogether. Then, as rationing was relaxed in the 1950s and Britons entered a period in which they “had never had it so good”, as Prime Minister Harold Macmillan so famously put it, the spending spree recommenced.

This was given an even greater impetus by the advent of commercial television and the speed with which advertising firms created special Christmas TV adverts for their clients. By the 1970s most Britons knew that ITV broadcasting at Christmas would be dominated by gift product advertisements rarely seen during the rest of the year.

Nowadays, of course, it seems that no sooner has the sun set on another summer than the seasonal spending spree gets under way – confirmation that the spirits of Gordon Selfridge, JP Robert and all those other pioneers of the shopping orgies of Christmases past are alive and well today. ■

**Mark Connelly** is professor of modern British history at the University of Kent

### DISCOVER MORE

#### BOOKS

► **Christmas: A Social History** by Mark Connelly (IB Tauris, 2012); **The Lives and Times of Ebenezer Scrooge** by Paul Davis (Yale University Press, 1990); **The Making of the Modern Christmas** by JM Golby, AW Purdue (Sutton, 2000)



# THE AGE OF OPPOR

Stories of Britain's industrial revolution have often cast the working class as its victims. But, as **Emma Griffin** explains, a look at 19th-century workers' own accounts gives us a more complex picture





# TUNITY



Thomas Allom's painting from 1835 shows *Lymington Iron Works on the Tyne*. Industrial sites provided work directly for battalions of labourers but also indirectly through their requirements for construction, fuel and raw materials. That rapidly growing workforce called for housing, food, furniture and clothing – creating yet more employment

BRIDGEMAN



The British industrial revolution stands out as a pivotal moment in human history. But when we think about the men, women and children who, with their strong backs and nimble fingers, did the most to power it, we tend to feel that there is less to celebrate.

All of the great Victorian commentators – Engels, Dickens, Blake – painted those industrial times in a very dark hue: they lamented the introduction of new working patterns that compelled men to work at the relentless pace of the machines; children forced into factories and down mines at ever-younger ages; families squeezed into dark, disease-ridden cities; and no future but the workhouse for those who slipped through the net.

Their dismal litany echoed through the 20th century as a succession of pioneering social historians – Barbara and John Hammond, Eric Hobsbawm and EP Thompson, to name a few – turned their attention to the devastating impact of the industrial revolution on the working poor.

### Workers' words

Yet, despite the frequency with which various versions of these bleak perspectives have been retold, their central claim – that this period was worse than anything that has gone before – has not received the scrutiny it deserves. In particular, it is remarkable that so little effort has been made to listen to what working people themselves had to say about their life and times.

Of course, it is usually countered that such an effort would be futile because such people did not leave behind much in the way of written sources. But though it is certainly true that they wrote far less than their social superiors, it is not the case that they wrote nothing at all. Their legacy is a little-known but remarkable collection of autobiographies written by working people. If we listen to these, we hear a story very different from the one that we are used to.

Historians have long been aware of the existence of such memoirs, but most have been sceptical about using them to study working-class life. After all, this was a period of relatively high illiteracy, so (it has been argued) there was something exceptional about the working man or woman with the ability to record their personal history.

Yet this line of argument assumes that literacy was more unusual among the working class than was really the case. In the 19th century, a range of very cheap avenues for developing literacy – dame schools, Sunday schools, night schools and

*Even skilled artisans in pre-industrial Britain were rarely able to make a good living*

mutual improvement societies – were available to both children and adults, so writing a memoir was within the grasp of even the very poor.

Among autobiographers of the time were men such as John Hemmingway, who was put to work in a Manchester cotton mill at the age of eight and raised in poverty by his mother following the desertion of the family by his father. As an adult, he turned his hand to various occupations – weaving, shop-keeping, driving a horse and cart, joining the army – but never rose above the station to which he had been born. In old age, he and his wife were forced to sell their furniture and wedding rings, move into a miserable cellar dwelling and live off a small dole from the parish. So, though some of the autobiographers were exceptional in one way or another, that was far from true of all.

Of course, the use of these accounts is not without its problems. One major frailty is the paucity of autobiographies written by women. Also, these writers were haunted by failures of memory, inevitably producing subjective accounts of their lives.

**Blacksmiths – like these, shown in *An Iron Forge* by Joseph Wright of Derby (1772) – struggled to make a living in agricultural regions. Yet, like other skilled workers, they found opportunities in new industrial works**



But nearly 400 autobiographies written during the period of industrialisation provide a rich and hitherto untapped seam of evidence that we cannot afford to ignore. Furthermore, in contrast to the other sources consulted by historians interested in the lives of ordinary workers – the poor law, the census, the criminal courts – these records were freely created by the men and women we wish to study. In this sense they are unique, and an excellent resource for the study of working-class experiences of the British industrial revolution.

What, then, do these personal histories tell us about how the advent of industrialisation changed workers' lives? More than anything, the autobiographers indicate that industrialisation, and the urban growth that accompanied it, increased the amount of work available.

These sources make it possible to compare descriptions of earning a living written by people in pre-industrial areas with those set in rural and industrial districts. They reveal that, in the absence of industry, most workers were not fully employed – and, as a result, lived in a state of chronic poverty.

The low wages and patchy employment of agricultural workers meant that even skilled artisans in pre-industrial Britain – shoemakers, blacksmiths, carpenters and so forth – were rarely able to make a good living from their trade, because few of their neighbours had the means to pay for their services. As a result, many skilled workers turned to agriculture to try to make ends meet – and the resulting growth in the number of people trying to eke out a livelihood from the land helped ensure that living standards remained low. This situation, more than anything else, changed with the emergence of industrialisation. The industrial revolution increased the amount of work available – for the skilled and the unskilled, for the young and the old. As manufacturing expanded, young men and women poured into cities from the countryside to work in the new factories.

### Full employment

But working on the factory floor was just the beginning. Coal was required to run the machines, providing an important stimulus for the mining industry. Factories needed their workers, but they also had to be built, their machines maintained, their warehouses organised – and it all amounted to a steady stream of employment for the people who flocked to the cities.

One autobiographer noted that goods needed to be weighed as well as made, and found a job doing precisely that. Others made a living transporting raw material and finished



John Cooke Bourne's 1837 painting, *Working Shaft, Kilsby Tunnel*, shows the construction of the London & Birmingham Railway. The line took nearly five years to complete and employed 20,000 men





### In their own words

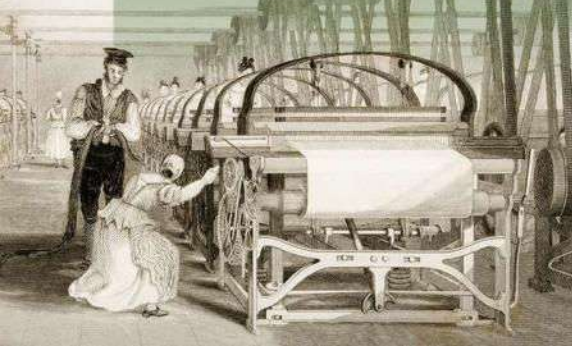
Historians have long known of the existence of working-class autobiographies. A bibliography of 19th-century memoirs compiled in the 1980s listed nearly 800 items, and many more have since come to light. They go under various titles: life histories, autobiographies, memoirs, notes, sketches, recollections and adventures, as well as many other, more idiosyncratic names. The defining feature of each, though, is that writer and subject are one and the same.

These are works that we would today recognise as autobiographies, though it's worth noting that the word 'autobiography' only entered the English language in the late 18th/early 19th century, long after the culture of life-writing had taken root.

Some of these books are well known, such as the great autobiographies of the Chartist leaders William Lovett, Thomas Cooper and Robert Lowery. A few found success in their own time. For example, James Dawson Burn's autobiography (some editions of which were titled *The Beggar Boy*) was first published in 1855; by the end of the decade a fourth edition was in print. Others were published in very small numbers by obscure provincial printers, more for the writer's satisfaction than in response to any public demand.

Some of the most interesting were not written for publication at all. One such example is the *Simple Narrative* written by John Lincoln, now stored in the vaults of the Norfolk Record Office. The 80 pages of Lincoln's notebook are fragile and torn, filled with the untidy hand of a self-taught writer. The closely inscribed, marginless pages remind us that Lincoln lived at a time when paper was a precious commodity. They contain a detailed account of his life, from earliest childhood recollections to the present, and range over topics – sex before marriage, an illegitimate child, an unhappy marriage and the death of the writer's small children – about which some of the more polished accounts were reticent.

**Weaving on power looms in a cotton factory, depicted in an engraving from c1830**



**Women and children also found work in factories and pits – here, a Bolton coal mine – but the welfare of children, in particular, suffered from the effects of long and consecutive days of employment**

goods – driving horses and carts, building railways, driving trains. Providing for the needs of a large population also created a mountain of work: the growing urban populace needed houses, furniture, bread, shoes and clothes. This demand for the staples of life provided plenty of business for skilled workers – and what's more, unlike the rural poor, the urban workforce had the money with which to pay them. The factories' labour needs meant that many workers were now fully employed throughout the year, which helped to drag families out of the grinding poverty that agricultural workers endured.

Full employment was the single most important way of increasing a family's prosperity, but it was also significant because it changed the balance of power in the working relationship. As long as workers outnumbered jobs, employers held the upper hand. In the industrial heartlands, though, the demand for workers was insatiable, placing them in a far stronger position to bargain over such matters as working hours and wages.

Included among the autobiographers are men who gave their notice over disputes concerning the length of tea breaks or the church they attended. One worker gave as a reason for resigning simply that he "got sick of the job"! Such actions were inconceivable in the rural context and help to remind us that full employment not only improved men's incomes but also enhanced their working conditions and status.

Yet, though adult men generally stood to gain from industrialisation, we should not assume that these advantages were enjoyed by others in their families. The demand for labour, particularly in the factories and mines, meant that there was ever more work for children too, with the unfortunate result that those in industrial districts were being hustled into the workforce at ever younger ages.

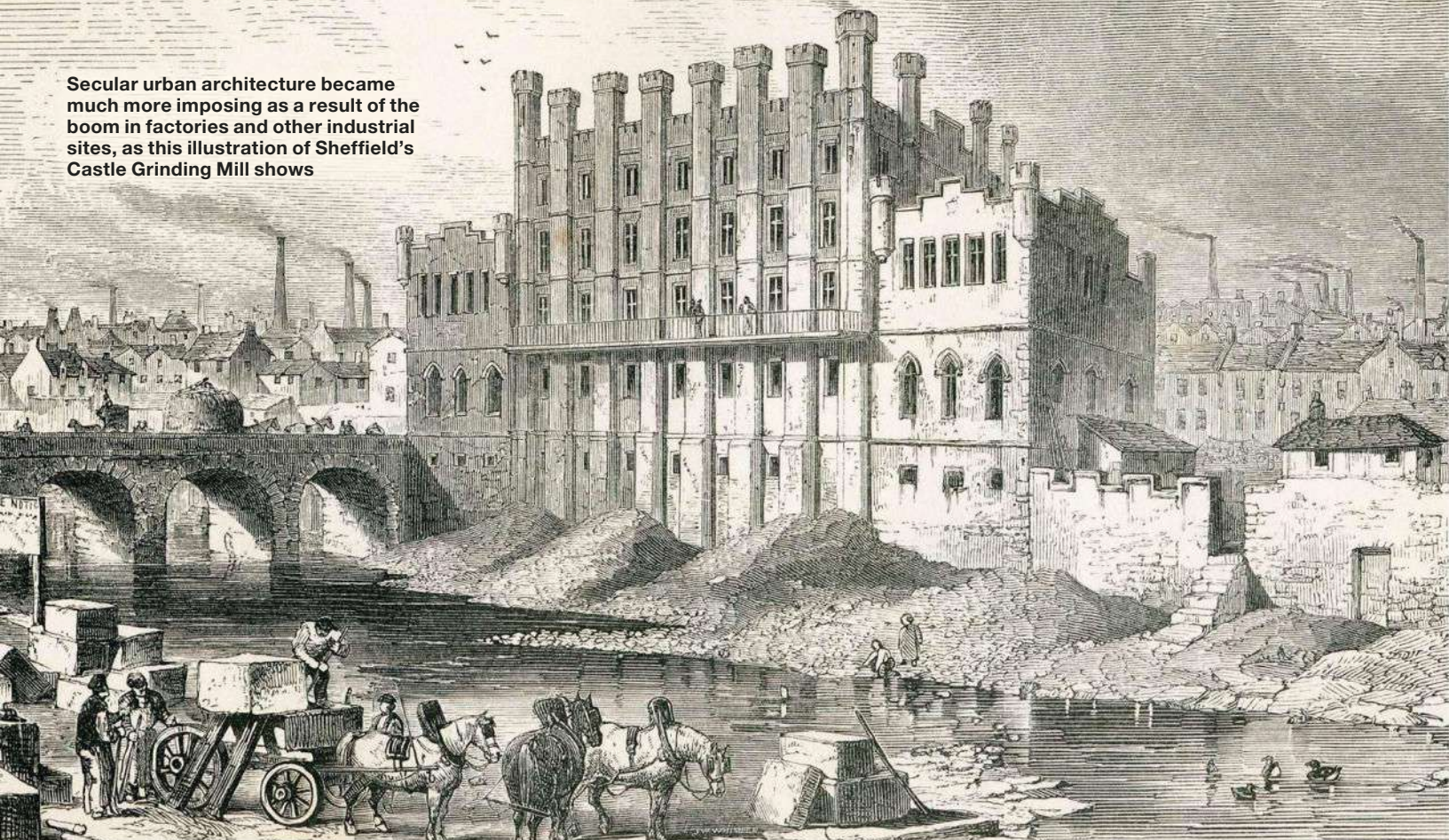
Accounts reveal that children living in rural areas and market towns did not usually enter the workplace until the age of 11 and a half. The contrast with the industrial districts is stark: on average, children in those areas started work aged eight and a half – three years younger than their peers living in areas without industrial employment.

Furthermore, in contrast to young workers in rural areas, who often started part-time and whose hours were limited by the seasons and daylight hours, children in factories and mines entered a world of full employment, working very long days, day in and day out, year after year.

In some respects, then, the evidence suggests that the situation for children mirrored that for adult men: industrial growth significantly improved their prospects of finding full-time employment. But whereas that enhanced living standards for men, it had the opposite effect on children. Working 13-hour days from the age of six or seven took a very serious toll on a child's health, development and wellbeing, making their overall welfare gains highly questionable.



Secular urban architecture became much more imposing as a result of the boom in factories and other industrial sites, as this illustration of Sheffield's Castle Grinding Mill shows



## Mother's ruin

The outcome of industrial growth for women was different again. Though it increased the likelihood of men and children finding full-time employment, usually at better wages than the agricultural alternatives on offer, it made relatively little difference to women's experiences in the workplace.

It is true that women living in the industrial heartlands benefited from the growth of factories. But, once they were married with a family, few were able to maintain a position in a factory, and most retreated from the workplace altogether. Betty Leeming, a mill hand in the Lancashire town of Preston, was typical in this respect. Following her marriage to Benjamin Shaw, she handed in her notice at the factory. Though she did make a few attempts to earn money from home following her marriage – she took in bobbin-winding and baked oatcakes to sell to her neighbours – she never returned to the factory.

Autobiographies also reveal that family responsibilities were the primary reason for women giving up paid jobs. Indeed, unmarried women and those with no children almost always worked outside the home.

In families with just one or two children, between 70 and 80 per cent of mothers worked. As a woman's family grew, however, the chances of her being in work rapidly diminished. Of mothers with three or four children, the participation rate hovered around 50 per cent, a figure that steadily

declined as families increased in size. Almost no women with eight or nine children did any paid work. In the absence of reliable childcare or effective means to limit family size, mothers had little choice but to stay at home and care for their families – a situation the industrial revolution did little to change.

The most obvious consequence of increased work opportunities was higher family incomes; for those living close to the breadline this was a very welcome development. But the changes were not simply material. A widely recognised feature of industrialisation is the growth of great towns. Historians have often drawn attention to the fact that these could be dark, crowded and unhealthy – but cities were also places of freedom.

In a city, one could attend a night school or worship at whichever church one chose. It was possible to join a union or even a political association, and start to shape the society in

which one lived. Men who threw themselves into city life did not view themselves as victims. William Aitken described his fellow Manchester Chartists as the “sons of freedom”. His view, shared by many other autobiographers, was that city life was liberating, not oppressive.

The outcomes of the industrial revolution were, clearly, mixed. Healthy adult men stood to gain the most, enjoying more work, higher wages and opportunities for cultural and political expression. Women were almost wholly bypassed by these developments and, though children were affected by the great demand for labour, for them the results were far from beneficial.

Nonetheless, this much is clear: we would do well to discard the darker interpretations of this era. The industrial revolution ushered in revolutionary social change, and working people certainly shared in the benefits. **H**

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**Emma Griffin** is professor of modern British history at the University of East Anglia. She has written widely on the history of working-class life in Britain

## DISCOVER MORE

### BOOKS

► **Liberty's Dawn: A People's History of the Industrial Revolution** by Emma Griffin (Yale University Press, 2014)

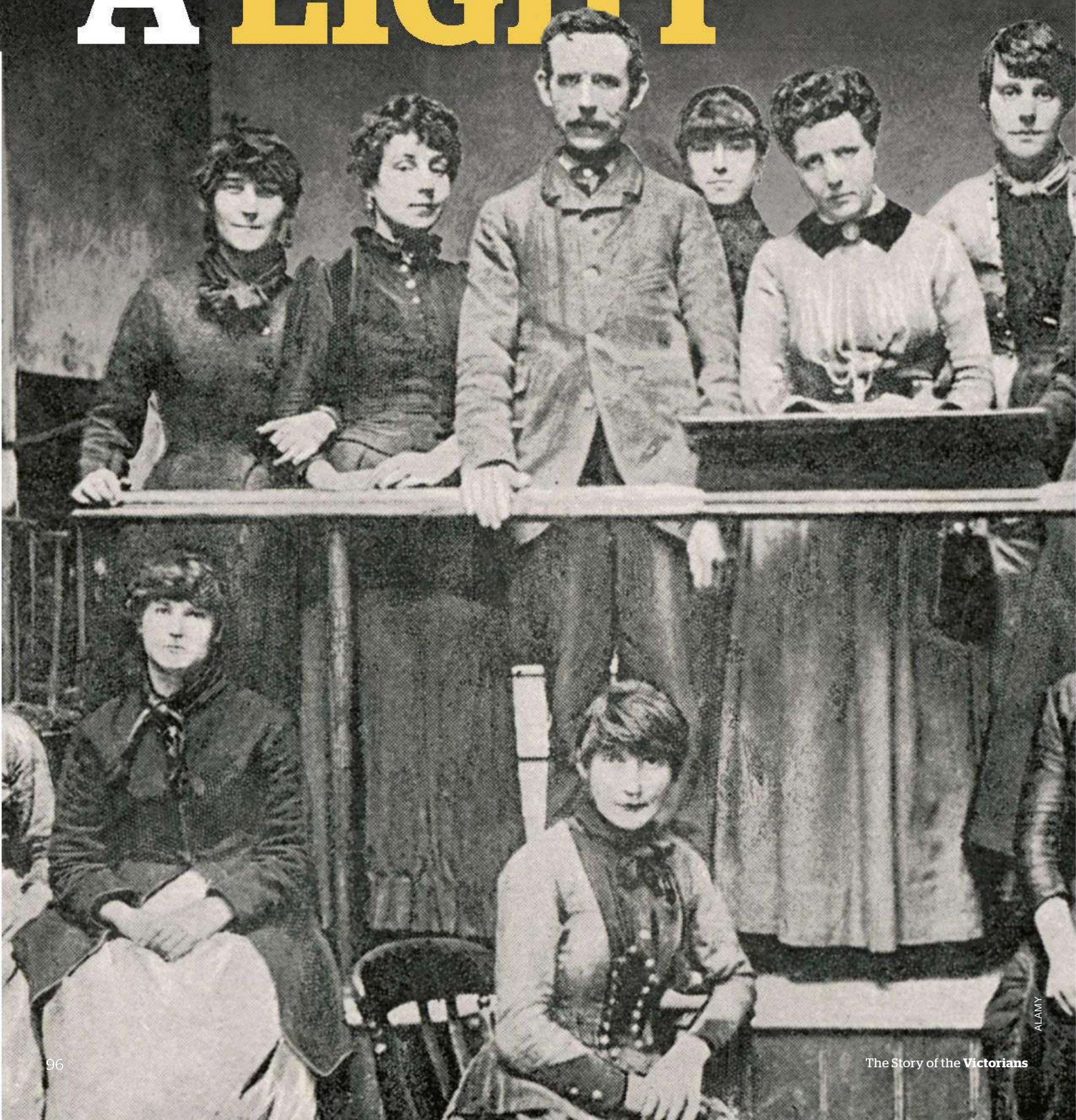
► **The Life of Thomas Cooper** by Thomas Cooper, introduction by John Saville (1872; Leicester University Press, 1971)

*Children in factories and mines entered a world of full-time employment and very long days*



At work and at play / Matchwomen's strike

# STRIKING A LIGHT





Members of the committee of the Union of Women Matchmakers, pictured in 1888. Annie Besant stands third right



In 1888, appalling working conditions sparked revolt among Bryant & May's female factory workers. **Louise Raw** hails the East End women who took on a ruthless cartel and changed the course of British labour history

In the summer of 1888, 1,400 workers, mostly young women and girls, walked out of an East End match factory and into the history books.

Before their strike, Bryant & May's match women were dismissed as a "rough set of girls" and the "lowest strata of society". Yet, during the dispute, questions were asked in parliament, and thundering editorials appeared in *The Times*. Just holding shares in the firm, which made matches, tarnished the reputations of distinguished politicians and clergymen. The women even earned the dubious accolade of receiving a threatening letter from Jack the Ripper, or someone claiming to be him.

The 'matchgirls' continue to exert a powerful hold over the public imagination to this day – plays and musicals written about them in the 1960s are still performed.

The women certainly were a colourful and vibrant presence on the East End streets. Even out of her work setting, accounts tell us that the matchgirl could be distinguished by the "freedom of her walk, shrillness of her laugh and number of her friends", as well as the bright clothes, fringed hairstyles and high-heeled boots they favoured. Appearance was important – the women paid into 'feather clubs' to buy and share between them the biggest hats they could find, trimmed with the largest feathers.

Even when not seen, they were heard – many an East End night echoed to 'Ta-ra-ra Boom-de-ay', and 'Knocked 'em in the Old Kent Road' from matchwomen on evenings out. "They seem to know by heart the words of all the popular music hall songs of the day," sighed one local magistrate.

However, in June 1888, an incendiary article by an East End woman of a very different class – but no less notoriety – revealed the horrors of the women's working lives.

Annie Besant's life was an extraordinary *fin de siècle* search for meaning, encompassing devout Christianity and marriage to a clergyman and loss of faith. It also comprised relationships with famous, if not notorious, men like scandalously-atheist MP Charles Bradlaugh, and George Bernard

Shaw. Besant ended her life as the de facto leader of a new religion and a venerated figure in India, where her body was cremated on a funeral pyre.

In 1877 she was tried for 'obscene libel' in connection with a campaign to teach contraceptive methods to poor East End women. She narrowly escaped prison and the press had a field day with the spectacle of a young, attractive woman, the estranged wife of a clergyman, being tried for obscenity.

In the 1880s Besant became a socialist after meeting Shaw, joining the Fabian Society of which he was a key member. At a Fabian meeting in June 1888, she first heard about conditions at Bryant & May's, and decided to investigate. Interviewing a handful of women outside the factory, she published her findings in political paper *The Link* under the resounding title 'White Slavery in London'.

### Malnourished workers

By this time the firm, controlled by sons of founder William Bryant, was a powerful player in both domestic and export markets, and a household name. By acting as a cartel, it had driven wages down so far that they were lower in 1888 than ten years previously. Besant found the truth of this written on the bodies of the workers: the youngest, malnourished while developing physically, were small and frail.

One 16-year-old earned four shillings a week; after rent, she could afford to eat only bread for every meal. The "sole bit of colour" in her life was provided by rare and longed-for occasions when someone would "stand treat" to the Paragon music hall in Mile End.

Bryant & May imposed fines on the women when matches accidentally caught fire, for having dirty feet, even for simply talking to one another. One girl was fined for altering a machine to prevent it cutting her hand, and told to look after the machinery and "never mind your fingers". Her workmate subsequently had her finger cut off by the same machine, and was left unable to work and penniless.

What the women feared most was 'phossy jaw', the grisly industrial disease of match-





*The women won the dispute, going on to form the largest union of women and girls in the country*

Members of the Union of Women Matchmakers, c1888

GETTY



making. Ingesting even a small amount of white phosphorus could cause vomiting. The effects of full-blown poisoning were horrific: beginning with toothache and a swollen face, the disease would rot the lower jaw, forcing pieces of bone the size of peas out through 'putrid abscesses' in the gums, filled with such evil-smelling pus that even loved ones couldn't bear the odour. Disfigurement and agonising death could result. Bryant & May's sole precaution seems to have been to dismiss anyone with a swollen face, or force women to have all their teeth pulled: it was alleged that a pregnant matchwoman who refused, fearing a miscarriage from shock, was sacked.

All in all, Besant concluded, 'chattel slaves' would have been better off than the unfortunate matchwomen.

The exposé was published on 23 June 1888, and it is perhaps not surprising that when the matchwomen walked out on strike days later Besant was widely assumed to be behind it; so much so that she has, for over 120 years, been regarded as the strike's leader.

That the women won the dispute, going on to form the largest union of women and girls in the country, was remarkable, given the power of their employers and considering that many unions would not let women join. The TUC's Henry Broadhurst was not alone in urging the return of women to "their proper sphere at home".

Just as remarkable was the impact the strike had on the matchwomen's fellow workers. Following their victory, a wave of strikes, including 1889's Great Dock Strike, swept the country. Tens of thousands of the most exploited workers formed new unions to fight for decent wages and conditions, sowing the seeds of the modern labour movement and Labour Party.

However, because middle-class socialists – rather than the workers themselves – supposedly led the matchwomen's strike, some historians dismiss it as a mere footnote in history, with no influence on what followed. The lives of the women themselves, unlike those of the dockers' leaders or indeed Annie Besant, were not thought worthy of further study. They seemed destined to remain silent, nameless faces looking solemnly out from a black and white photograph, frozen forever in one moment in time – until recently.

Modern research has uncovered new truths about the strike, proving beyond doubt that the workers themselves were the driving force behind the walkout – and that their actions altered the course of British labour history.

The strike actually began in response to management bullying, not any urging by Besant. Bryant & May, furious at Besant's article, demanded that the women sign

a statement saying that they were happy and well-treated. The women refused, and warned Besant in a note delivered to her home: "Dear Lady they have been trying to get the poor girls to say it is all lies that has been printed and to sign a paper. ...we will not sign. We hope you will not get into any trouble on our behalf as what you have spoken is quite true."

### Downing tools

Bryant & May did not stop there, next making an example of one girl they believed had spoken to Besant, a "pale little person in black" who was popular with her workmates. When she was sacked, her workmates immediately downed tools and followed her. Quickly assembling a picket line at the gates, they elected six women to put their terms: reinstatement of their colleague, an end to fines, and a dining room – currently the women had to eat in the work rooms and toxic particles settling on food was a factor in 'phossy jaw'. Bryant & May responded by threatening the strikers with dismissal, but the "spirit of revolt against cruel oppression" had been ignited; they would not go back.

One local paper, initially siding with the 'gentlemen' employers, disapprovingly noted: "the streets and thoroughfares of East London...swarmed with the girls... (who) marched up and down the streets soliciting coppers, quite willing to pour their tale of hardships into every sympathetic ear. On Tuesday morning...a vanload of pink roses drew up...sent down – by whom it did not transpire – to be worn by the strikers as badges."

By the end of the first week, the "whole factory was lying idle". "Eleven hundred employees paraded the streets in the neighbourhood of Bow on Thursday and Friday. A large number of police have had to be stationed in the neighbourhood."

Annie Besant's own accounts show that she was working upstairs in her offices four days after the walkout began, when a group of matchwomen arrived asking for her. Her first concern was that they were blocking the pavement below, but she finally agreed to talk to three "respectable" looking matchwomen – and only then discovered that they were on strike.

Besant was not closely monitoring, let alone directing, events. And she never claimed so, insisting: "With regard to the charge that we instigated the strike...this

**Annie Besant in 1888. Was she a mere bit-part player in the matchgirls strike?**



## Timeline

### The fight for workers' rights

**1788** The first recorded all-female union, of Leicester spinners, numbers some 18,500.

**1799-1824** It becomes illegal for working people to 'combine' together for better pay and conditions.

**1825** After these 'Combination Acts' are repealed in 1824, there is a wave of strikes. So the Combinations of Workmen Act is passed in 1825 to reimpose criminal sanctions on workers that combine.

**1834** Six men, the so-called 'Tolpuddle Martyrs', are deported to Australia for joining a union.

**1837** The Chartist movement calls for all men to have the vote – but women are still active and influential in the movement.

**1848** A Chartist petition presented at a huge demonstration in London is rejected by parliament. The movement begins to decline.

**1850-70** 'New model' unions from the 1850s to 1870s represent a minority of skilled workers. Low-paid women are seen as unwelcome competition.

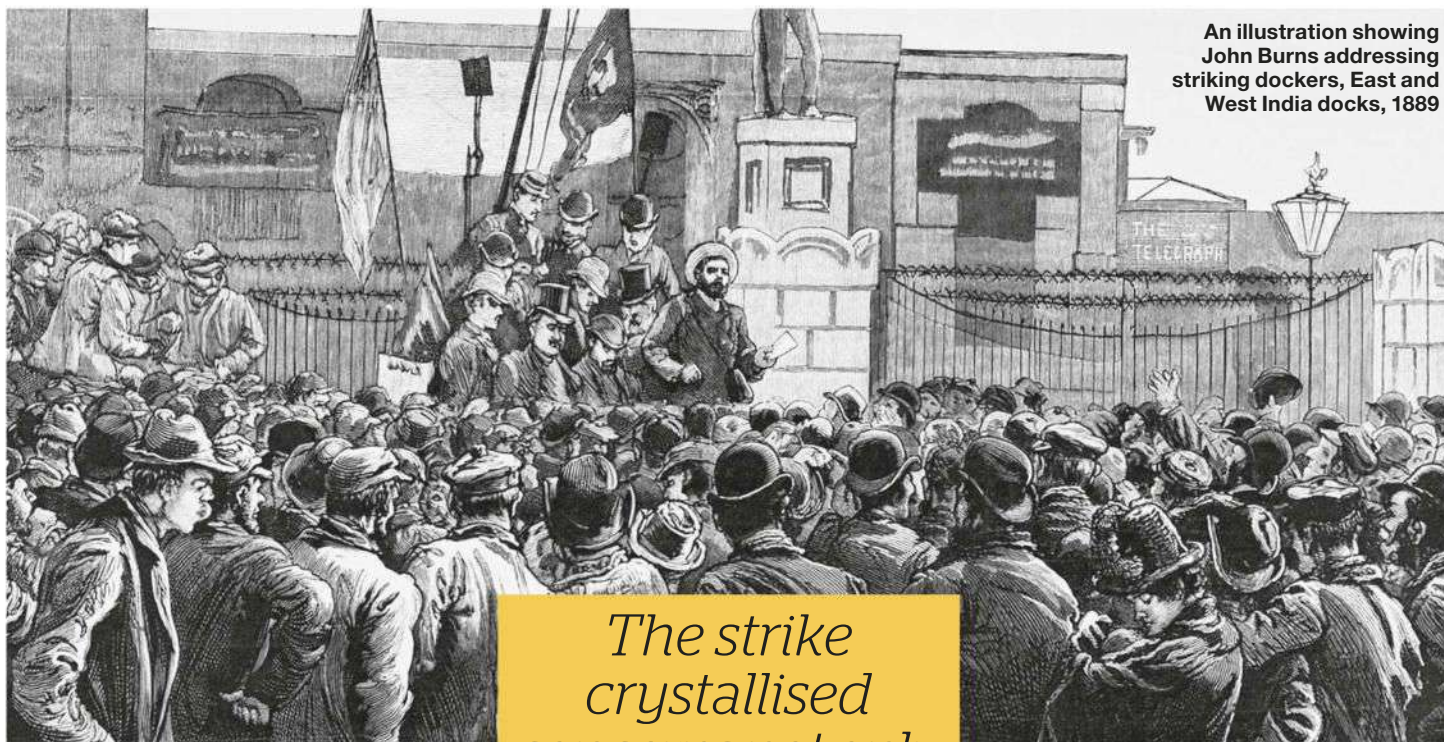
**1870** When middle-class women begin to appear at the TUC to speak for working women, Henry Broadhurst has them removed, as "under the influence of emotion they might vote for things they would regret in cooler moments".

**1874** Organisations like the Women's Protective and Provident League (WPPL) are established in 1874 and are generally organised outside the labour movement.

**1888** Outbreaks of industrial action by the most exploited workers begins to force the country to "take their predicament and determination seriously".

**1890** By 1890, average working-class life expectancy is 27 years. It is estimated that half of the children of the poor die before they are five.





An illustration showing John Burns addressing striking dockers, East and West India docks, 1889

*The strike crystallised concerns not only about 'factory girls' but also the exploitation of the new urban working poor*

statement is absolutely false, nor were we, as asserted, near the factory on the day it commenced." In fact, she thought striking was a mistake, and said so in *The Link*.

The women went several days without money, but maintained a cheerful solidarity: "the girls were determined to stand together at all costs. 'I can pawn this for you', 'I'll lend you that', in every direction girls might be seen plotting how they could help one another."

The strike crystallised concerns not only about 'factory girls' but the exploitation of the new urban working poor, at a time when social revolution seemed a genuine possibility. There were accusations of hypocrisy: "Messrs Bryant & May are well known Liberals and have...paraded their Liberalism before the world. More than one shareholder is a well-known member of parliament who...profess to champion the cause of the poor and the oppressed. How could they meet their constituents with large dividends in their pockets...when their employees in the east of London existed on next to starvation wages?"

As pressure grew, the directors had to accept that a mere "set of girls" had humbled them, and reluctantly conceded to their demands. *The Star* enthused over the "magnificent" victory, "won without preparation – without organisation – without funds...a turning point in the history of our industrial development".

Who, then, really led the strike? An account from 1888 named a young matchwoman called Eliza as "one of the leaders", and in 1999 a list of suggested 'ringleaders' was found in company archives, naming five women: Eliza Martin, Alice Francis, Kate Slater, Mary Driscoll and Jane Wakeling.

After an extensive search for descendants, Eliza Martin's grandchildren were finally traced and interviewed. Though Eliza had died in middle age and possibly in tragic circumstances, they had learned about her from her children, their own father, aunts and uncles. Grandson Jim Best recalled seeing a photograph of the strike committee in a local newspaper in the 1980s: "I remember my dad saying, 'that's your nan'. She'd told dad she and her mates were involved in the strike. We're proud of that."

Mary Driscoll's granddaughter, Joan Harris, was also found. She was extremely close to her grandmother and recalled her talking about conditions in the factory and 'phossy jaw'.

Historians have said that matchwomen were too different from dockers to have influenced their strike. Yet Driscoll was a docker's daughter and later wife. Eliza Martin's brother-in-law and nephews were dockers. As Jim Best put it, and as Census records confirm, matchwomen and dockers were "the same people", from the same East End streets and families.

Records also show that the dockers contacted the matchwomen's union for

advice after their victory, and that there was an attempted strike on the docks just weeks later. Once the 1889 dock strike had begun, famous orator John Burns, later an MP, urged a mass meeting of tens of thousands to "stand shoulder to shoulder. Remember the matchgirls, who won their strike and formed a union".

*The Star* described the victorious procession marking the dockers' victory: "up came the dockers. Then a large contingent of women...matchmakers, among others, advanced like a moving rainbow, for they all wore the huge feathers of many colours which the East End lass loves to sport when she is out for the day."

In 1940 Ernest Bevin wrote to surviving dock strikers about the importance of their action: "Fifty years ago...you were among those who were involved in...a great industrial upheaval – virtually a revolution against poverty, tyranny and intolerable conditions. You little thought during those weeks...that you were laying the foundation of a great Industrial Movement."

We must now accept this to have been equally true of those other remarkable East Enders, the Bryant & May matchwomen. **II**

**Dr Louise Raw** writes and speaks on labour, the East End and women's history. She has appeared on programmes including *Who Do You Think You Are?* and *The Worst Jobs in History*

### DISCOVER MORE

#### BOOK

► **Striking a Light: The Bryant and May Matchwomen and their Place in History** by Louise Raw (Continuum, 2011)



# William Hesketh Lever

1851-1925

Businessman who built one of the first consumer goods business empires, and looked after his workers' well-being – whether they liked it or not

**B**orn into a middle-class background in Bolton, William Hesketh Lever was given a copy of Samuel Smiles's *Self-Help* on his 16th birthday and tried to live by its precepts for the rest of his life. He was a staunch Nonconformist churchman (Congregationalist), had a powerful sense of social and moral obligation and ended his life as a viscount.

Energetic and autocratic, he was the Northern industrialist who slept outdoors in all weather and who would dismiss proposals he disagreed with by saying: "Aye, nay, we won't argue. You're wrong". This would seem to make Lever the personification of the Victorian businessman – a bit of a cliché, even. But in other ways he was startlingly modern.

As a young man he entered the family grocery business. An admirer of the newfangled sales and marketing techniques coming out of America, he observed his own customers' tastes and habits carefully.

He branched out into business with his younger brother James, and eventually the Lever Brothers would give the world Sunlight Soap, Lux soap powder, Vim household cleaner and more. At first this was all about buying the goods from suppliers, but they soon made the logical move of acquiring factories of their own and taking over other firms or entering into partnership with them.

His best-known welfare initiative was the building of Port Sunlight, the model village for his workers on the Wirral, with its pretty houses and gardens and sporting and leisure facilities. Yet behind it was an iron-fisted paternalism characteristic of much Victorian philanthropy, notably a set of rules for residents' conduct and compulsory

communal activities that would be intolerable nowadays.

Like many in late Victorian times, he was a convinced imperialist and believed the British empire should expand. While his business expanded into overseas markets, he also acquired palm-oil plantations in Africa to secure his supply chain. There are stories of mistreatment of African workers, particularly in the Congo – a stain which the schools and hospitals he built there will not erase.

Lever was a Liberal, a great admirer of Gladstone and made several unsuccessful attempts to enter parliament – though when he did become an MP he found day-to-day politics too demanding. He was raised to the peerage, though, as Baron Leverhulme, taking the second part of the

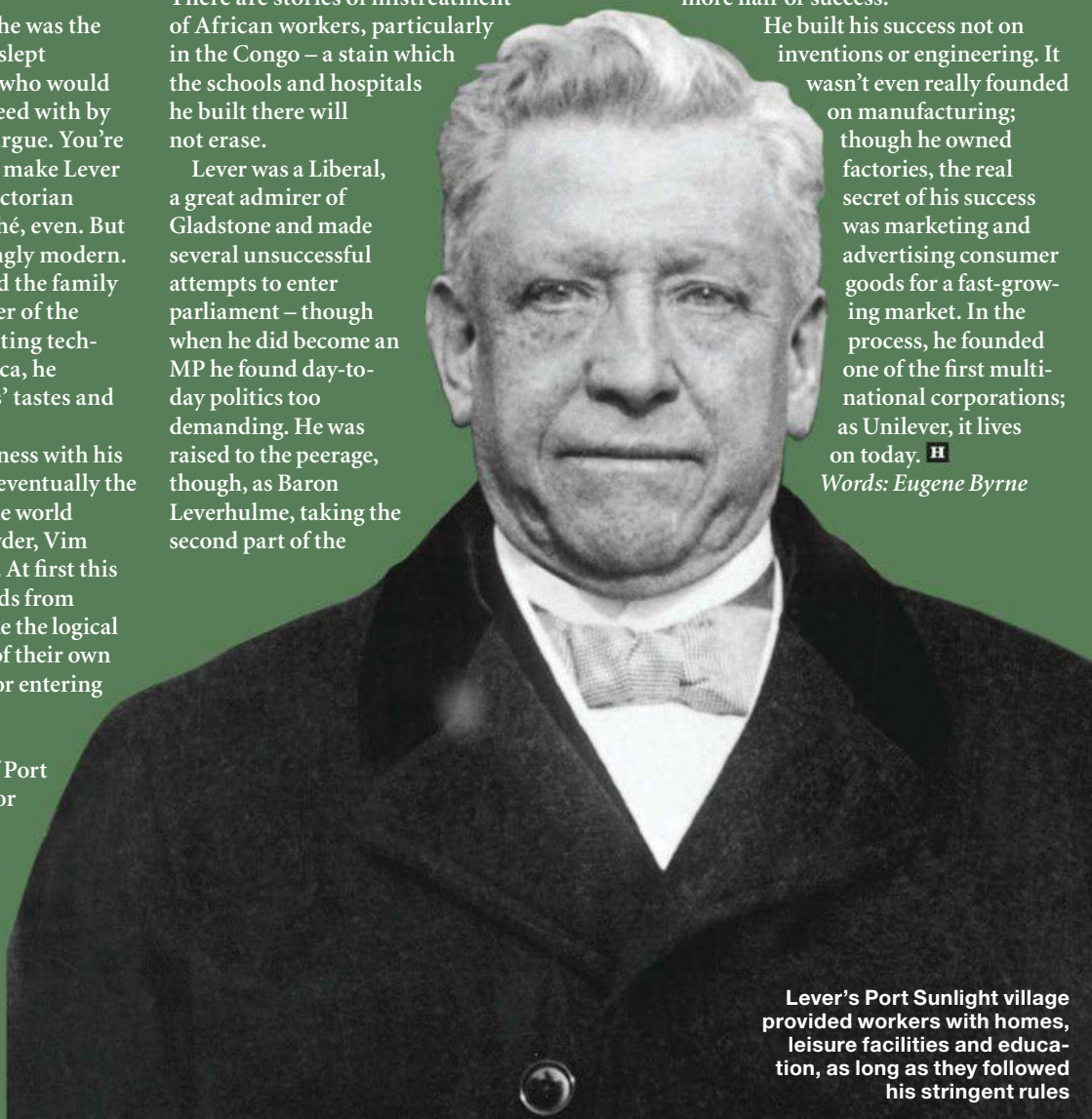
*The Northern industrialist would dismiss proposals he disagreed with by saying "Aye, nay, we won't argue. You're wrong".*

name from the maiden name of his childhood sweetheart Elizabeth Hulme, who he had married in 1874.

Lever is one of the people to whom the quote "I know that half the money I spend on advertising is wasted, but I don't know which half" is ascribed. But in any event nobody had ever before sold soap with more flair or success.

He built his success not on inventions or engineering. It wasn't even really founded on manufacturing; though he owned factories, the real secret of his success was marketing and advertising consumer goods for a fast-growing market. In the process, he founded one of the first multinational corporations; as Unilever, it lives on today. **H**

Words: Eugene Byrne



Lever's Port Sunlight village provided workers with homes, leisure facilities and education, as long as they followed his stringent rules



Increased spending power, cheap fares, new train routes and an entitlement to holidays made a break at the seaside accessible to thousands of working-class Victorians

# SEASIDE





# LOVE AFFAIR

Victorian Britons were the first to head for the seaside in their thousands. **John K Walton** reveals how growing prosperity and the birth of the railways brought the delights of donkey rides, peep shows and Punch and Judy to the masses





Holidaymakers on Margate pier, c1880. The town developed rapidly as visitors, mainly from London, flocked to enjoy its amusements and sandy beaches



Summer Saturday mornings came to life early at Blackpool in the late 1870s. Excursion trains would start to arrive from the Lancashire 'cotton towns' before breakfast, having started their journeys in the small hours.

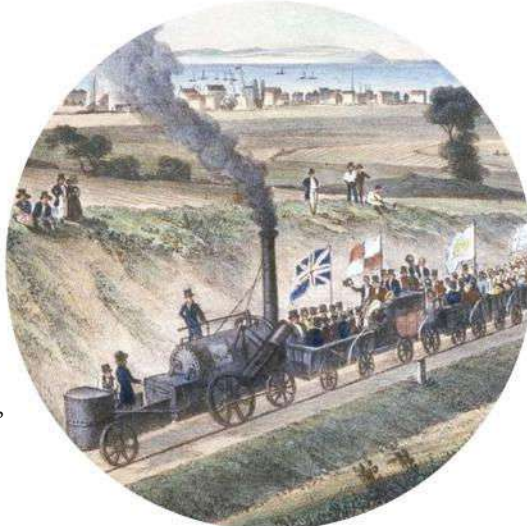
Crowds of excited trippers, many in their workaday wooden clogs, clattered along the stone setts of the promenade from Central Station to the South Jetty, where a German oompah band played for thunderous dancing on the wooden floor, while Irish Sea paddle-steamers set off for Southport or the Isle of Man. On the way, they could ride on a steam roundabout, or have phrenologists read their character from the 'bumps' on their head, in the front gardens of the terraced houses along what was to become the 'Golden Mile'.

Soon the stalls on the beach would open, offering shooting galleries and public corn-cutting, alongside the inevitable donkeys (in 1897 there would also be camels). Those who were staying for a few days or a week would take their boxes and trunks, and paper bags of food, to their lodging-house in a street near the station. Others would head for the new winter gardens, where breakfast would be available, and later enjoy the open-air bars and dancing platform

at the Raikes Hall pleasure park. The famous tower was a thing of the future: it opened in 1894. But popular Blackpool was very much in business.

Blackpool was early in this field, and its scale was already unique. But similar scenes were spreading around the British coastlines in the late 19th century, from Margate and Southend-

**The opening of the Canterbury and Whitstable railway, 1830. The coming of the railways made it easier for thousands of working-class city dwellers to head for the coast**



on-Sea (Eastend-on-Mud, to *Punch* magazine) on the Thames estuary, to Dunoon and Rothesay on the Clyde coast. Wherever railways or paddle-steamers made seaside places cheaply accessible to those benefiting from regular wages and reductions in food prices, the working people followed.

These were the first working-class holidaymakers in the world, a product of the first industrial society; and they fed into a much older pattern of commercial seaside visits, originally catering for health-seekers, which developed from the early 18th century in step with the first industrial and consumer revolutions. In its modern form this was also a British, indeed specifically English, invention, which was later exported, like association football, across much of the world.

There were earlier versions of the seaside holiday. The Romans had seaside resorts, although they were organised around elite summer residences rather than cheap fun for the plebs. Across the globe, including in Britain (especially Lancashire), there were many examples of popular summer gatherings at the shore, to bathe and (in some places) drink the sea-water, especially around the time of the August spring tide which (in Catholic countries) coincided closely with the Feast of the Assumption.

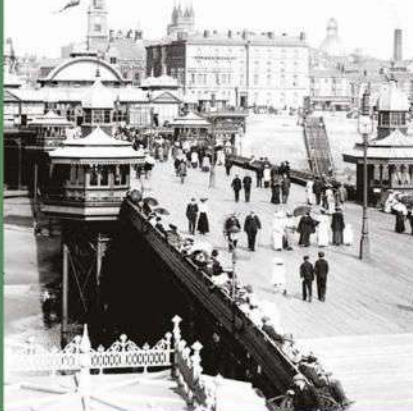




## Piers

The pleasure pier was, by definition, unique to the seaside. Existing harbour jetties were used for promenading early on, and in 1823 Brighton acquired a suspension 'Chain Pier'. But from the 1860s especially, promenade and pleasure piers, with slot-machines and entertainments, became an emblem of the seaside, and every self-respecting resort had to have one. Some had two, and Blackpool, from 1893, had three. But fire, storm, ship strikes and postwar neglect have reduced their numbers.

**A view of Blackpool from its North Pier in 1906. The pier was something that no seaside resort worth its salt could afford to do without**



Muslims had similar festivals of the sea, and Turkey had sea-hammams (medicinal bathing resorts) as well as inland ones. Scheveningen, in the Netherlands, attracted visitors – and painters – who enjoyed the ambience of the old fishing port in the 17th century. It was Britain, however, which inaugurated and developed the modern ritual of the seaside summer holiday as something healthy, desirable, enjoyable, commercially organised and democratic.

The modern seaside holiday seems to have begun with the commercial provision of sea-bathing at the emergent port of Liverpool in the early 18th century and, a little later, at Scarborough and Whitby on the Yorkshire coast. It originated in an extension of the growing medical fashion for 'taking the waters' at mineral springs, as at Bath and Tunbridge Wells, and Scarborough itself. These were the original 'spa' resorts, named after an early resort town in what is now Belgium. As doctors adapted popular ideas about the health-giving properties of sea-water and incorporated them into medical 'science', they sent their patients to the seaside and instructed them in how many times they should bathe, for how long, and how they should recover from the experience. Cold, brisk, strong northern seas were thought to be better for you, hence the early recourse to chilly North Sea waters.

However, as the fashion for the seaside developed in step both with the commercial and industrial revolutions of the 18th century and the spread of consumer spending among the expanding middle ranks of business people and professionals, the rapidly-expanding metropolis of London became the main engine of growth. So, from the 1730s onwards, the dynamic development of seaside resorts was concentrated in the south-east, especially at Margate and Brighton.

These declining seaports were given a new lease of life by sea-bathing, and soon began to provide shops, libraries, ballrooms and amusements for growing numbers of leisured visitors who sought fashion, status, flirtation and fun as much as health. Purpose-built hotels and lodging-houses, in fashionable

*These were the first  
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Georgian terraces and crescents, grew up alongside the fishermen's cottages. Margate benefited from easy access to London along the Thames, provided by sailing vessels called 'hoys' that also carried grain to the metropolis. Meanwhile Brighton offered the shortest land journey, and attracted the patronage of the pleasure-loving Prince of Wales who eventually became King George IV. His mistresses and raffish entourage gave Brighton an enticing combination of fashionable allure and sleazy glamour which it never lost, and his oriental pavilion established a lasting association between the seaside and exotic architecture.

Even before the arrival of the railway, Brighton at the beginning of the 1840s had an off-season population of around 40,000, standing head and shoulders above the growing numbers of other seaside resorts. This underlines that the railways (together with paddle-steamers, especially on the Thames and Clyde estuaries and the Bristol Channel) boosted and popularised an existing seaside fashion, rather than starting it.

Several seaside resorts were highlighted by the 1851 census report as featuring among the fastest-growing English towns, alongside the more conventional industrial centres of manufacturing and mining; during the 1820s Brighton headed the list alongside Bradford. But from the 1840s onwards the railway system enabled the urban populations of the industrial English north and Midlands to join the seaside fun in growing numbers.

Special excursion trains, often organised very cheaply by Sunday schools or the temperance movement, took hundreds or even thousands of day-trippers to the coast at a time. They were accident-prone, but they gave many poor town-dwellers their first experience of the sea, and not just in industrial areas. Among the 78 deaths in the Armagh train disaster of June 1889, on a seaside excursion to the little Northern Irish resort of Warrenpoint, were three labourers, two domestic servants, three dressmakers (and two apprentices), two milliners and a shop assistant, as well as several teenage daughters of local farmers, and many small children.

## Feasts and tides

What promoted the development of a popular seaside holiday industry, beginning in the Lancashire and Yorkshire textile manufacturing towns, was the use of cheap fares at traditional holiday times, initially the Lancashire Wakes and West Riding feasts and tides, for extended seaside visits.

The dominant industries in the north increasingly provided regular, reliable work, and employers recognised the established unpaid holidays and even extended them. Meanwhile, jobs for women and children

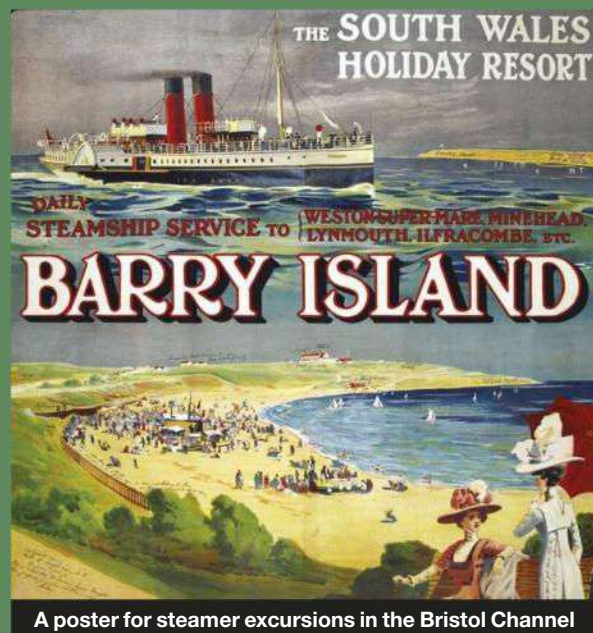


## Six holiday hot spots

### 1 Blackpool

The world's first working-class seaside resort, Blackpool exploded from the 1870s, based on the Lancashire Wakes holidays. The late Victorian winter gardens, tower and Alhambra, three piers, pleasure beach, and the municipal illuminations from 1912, headed a unique line-up of attractions. A national resort by the 1930s, and still hugely popular, it peaked in the 1950s.

A colour print of Blackpool's world-famous tower, c1894–1900



A poster for steamer excursions in the Bristol Channel

### 2 Bournemouth

Originally offering pine-laden air for invalids, Bournemouth grew rapidly after the late arrival of a direct railway in 1870. Its active local authority supported winter gardens and a municipal orchestra, but from Edwardian times it drew more popular crowds to its Undercliff Drive, piers and beaches, especially from the industrial Midlands.

### 3 Rothesay

Paddle-steamers, later supplemented by railway links, fed the Glasgow fair and summer weekend exodus "doon th' watter" to the Clyde coast and islands, with riotous crowds for the last return boat. Rothesay, on the Isle of Bute, developed winter gardens, and has protected its luxurious Victorian gentlemen's urinals on the pier.

### 4 Barry Island

Barry was the resort for Welsh miners and steel and tinplate workers from the late 19th century. Bristol Channel paddle-steamers were supplemented by the railway from 1896. Caravan sites and cheap accommodation later predominated – with Butlin's a late arrival in 1966 – not to mention the biggest amusement park in south Wales.

### 5 Great Yarmouth

Paddle-steamers and trains brought Victorian Londoners and Midlanders to this medieval seaport and early popular resort, with its herring fishery, 'bloaters' and narrow lanes or 'Rows'. The Victorians provided two piers and the Edwardian Corporation imported winter gardens from Torquay. The local 'Golden Mile' is still busy with stalls and amusements.

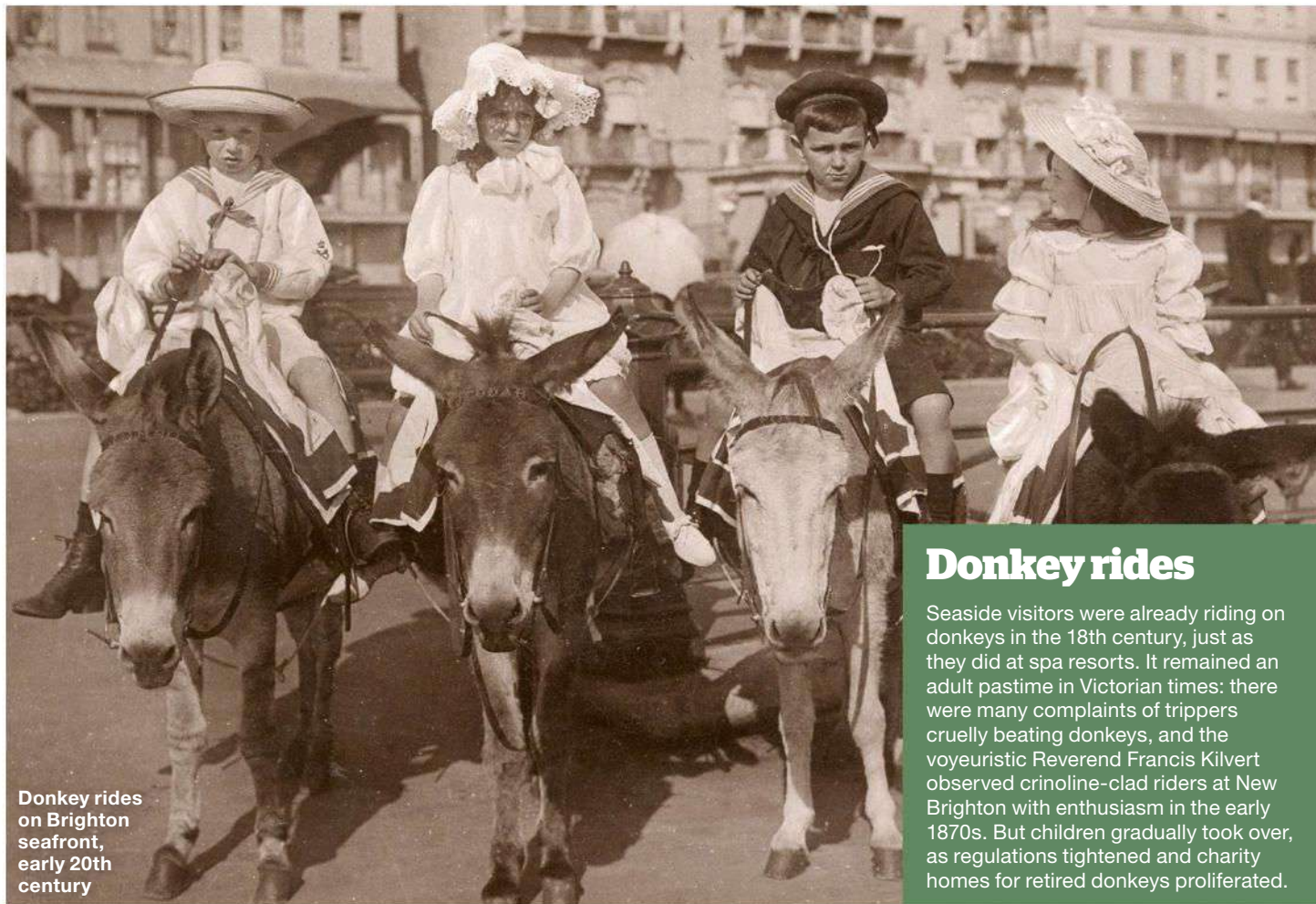
### 6 Scarborough

The first British coastal resort, diversifying from a fashionable cliff-side spa in the early 18th century. From 1845 the railway brought trippers, who walked down to the harbour beach below the castle, and the North Bay later grew in popularity. The local authority invested in magnificent bathing pools and parks, while three cliff lifts eased the journey to the beach.

Scarborough, Britain's first coastal resort, in the 19th century







Donkey rides on Brighton seafront, early 20th century

## Donkey rides

Seaside visitors were already riding on donkeys in the 18th century, just as they did at spa resorts. It remained an adult pastime in Victorian times: there were many complaints of trippers cruelly beating donkeys, and the voyeuristic Reverend Francis Kilvert observed crinoline-clad riders at New Brighton with enthusiasm in the early 1870s. But children gradually took over, as regulations tightened and charity homes for retired donkeys proliferated.

boosted family incomes as basic prices fell in the late 19th century, freeing up spending power for commercial sport, entertainment and holidays. Different towns had different holidays, spread through the summer and creating a market for seaside accommodation and pleasure providers. Working people organised savings clubs to prepare for their seaside visits, just as they saved for Christmas or for new clothes at Whitsuntide.

Casual or unskilled workers might fall outside this charmed circle, but by the 1890s Lancashire 'cotton towns' would be almost deserted during what was now the 'Wakes Week', as popular resorts literally set out their stalls to cater for this lucrative market. Meanwhile piers and 'pleasure palaces', funded by shareholders in limited companies, eagerly pursued the trippers' sixpences.

In other parts of industrial Britain established holidays were similarly adapted on a smaller scale, sending working-class visitors to north Wales, the Lancashire coast, the Clyde resorts and the Isle of Man. West Midlanders also went to Aberystwyth, Weston-super-Mare, Weymouth and Bournemouth; Leicester and Nottingham folk to Skegness and Great Yarmouth; Sheffielders to Cleethorpes; West Yorkshire people to Morecambe, Scarborough and Whitby; and Tynesiders to Whitley Bay and Scarborough. Railway workers at Swindon

or Crewe had their own works holidays, with free or concessionary travel.

A huge popular holiday industry thus flourished before the First World War. In 1911 around 1.5 million people lived in nearly 150 British seaside resorts, and Blackpool already had four million visitors a year. The middle-class families who were still the backbone of most resort economies found ways of enjoying themselves alongside the workers, whose behaviour became more polite and less boisterous as they learned holiday manners.

Each resort had its own distinctive mix of holidaymakers, accommodation and entertainments, and guide-books helped people to make informed choices – though many came back to the same place every year, as entire streets converged on the same boarding houses. But people also 'dressed up' to pretend to be 'better' than they were. The

seaside invented its own traditions, with minstrel and pierrot shows, pier entertainment (including slot machine peep shows), deck chairs, boat rides, Punch and Judy and all the pleasures of the beach.

This pattern continued into the 1960s and even the 1970s – though there were some important changes after the First World War. More working-class families, if they were in employment, could now afford to bring children. Holidays with pay became more widely available – even though the act of 1938 making them general was not applied until 1950 (the cotton workers who had pioneered the popular seaside holiday were among the last to benefit).

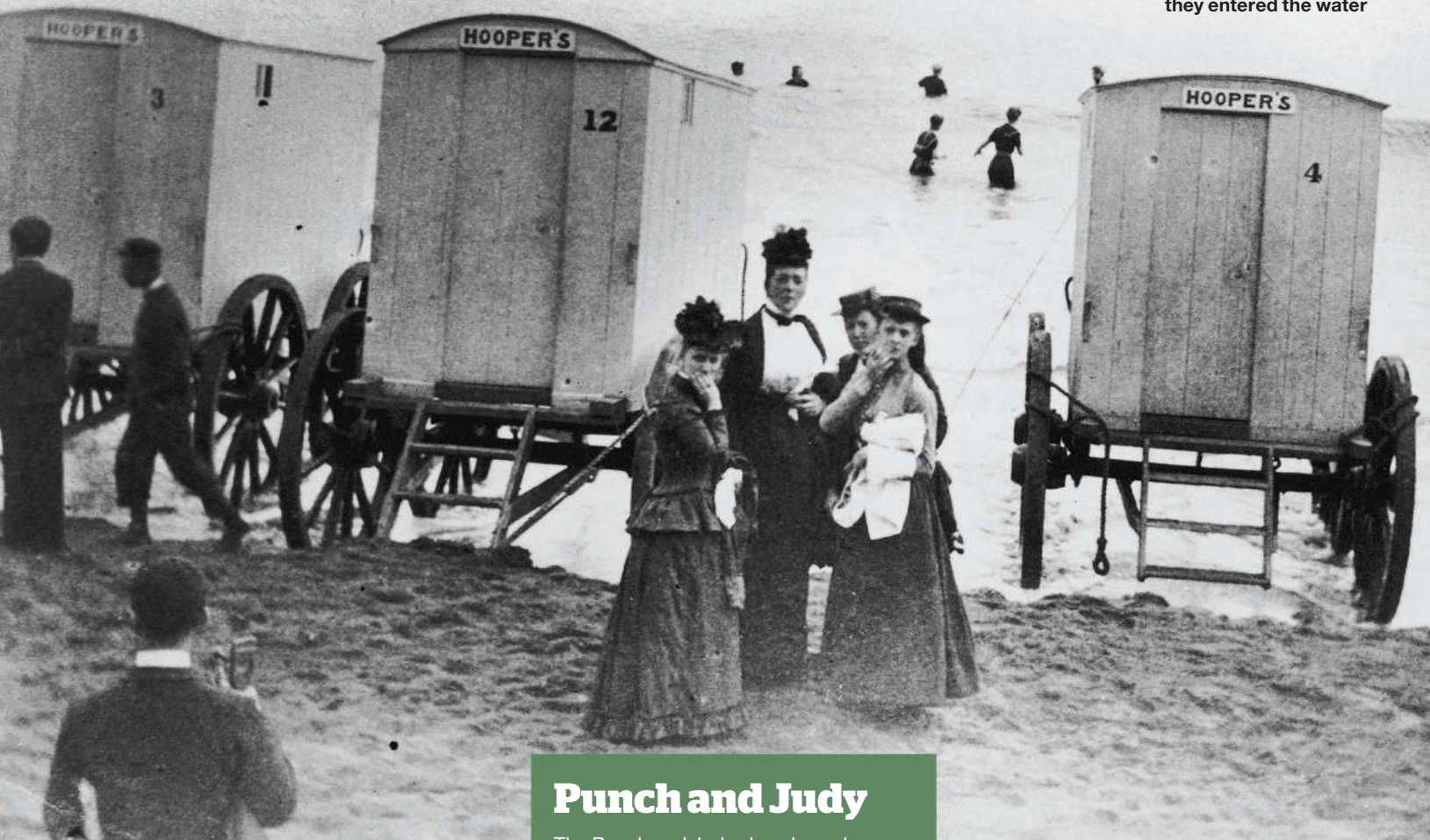
Holiday camps offered new experiences, especially when Butlin's developed a new model of communal pleasure and shared catering and entertainment. Interwar beaches became more relaxed and informal, as family 'mixed' bathing was officially tolerated, the old bathing-machines gave way to tents and huts, and costumes became shorter and more revealing (for men and women alike). The pursuit of a healthy suntan was becoming fashionable long before Coco Chanel on the Riviera.

Modernist architecture appeared at the seaside, in the form of bathing pools, lidos, the De La Warr Pavilion at Bexhill and the Midland Hotel at Morecambe. Coaches and

*By the 1890s, Lancashire 'cotton towns' would be almost deserted during 'Wakes Week'*

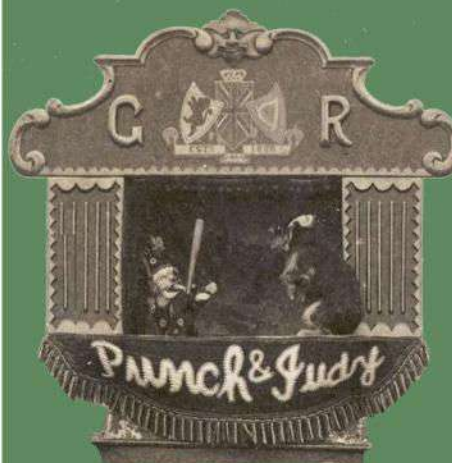


Horse-drawn bathing machines protected swimmers' modesty as they entered the water



## Punch and Judy

The Punch and Judy show has a long pedigree, dating from at least the 1660s in England. Like the pierrots, in late Victorian times it became especially identified with the seaside and with children's entertainment. Its robust humour and politically incorrect plot-lines (violence, wife-beating, cruelty to crocodiles) suited seaside 'edginess' but made its 'Professors' an endangered species, despite its participatory populism. However, it has survived tenaciously in several seaside resorts.



Seaside edginess: a Punch and Judy theatre dating to 1880

cars began to challenge trains, although the railways remained important as carriers to the coast until the early 1960s.

By the 1920s the British seaside was beginning to seek inspiration from the very places to which it had originally exported the beach holiday – first to France, then to the north-western European mainland, and on to Spain, where until the 1950s the most important resorts were on the Atlantic coast, not the Mediterranean.

The United States picked up on elite seaside tourism at Newport, Rhode Island, and the seaside followed the imperial flag to South Africa and Australia. Holiday traditions mutated as they passed through different cultures: the influences on Spain (and Indo-China) were French; and on Latin America, Spanish; although the British presence in Argentina affected resort development there.

Australians gave up on seaside piers, and developed their distinctive surfing culture, after the British-style construction at Coogee fell foul of the elements in the 1930s. However, the original wellsprings of the global seaside industry were British. This tends to be forgotten, because the demand for British seaside holidays was domestic, and British

resorts were never promoted overseas, thereby remaining externally invisible.

The British themselves have a love-hate relationship with their seaside, celebrating it nostalgically while denigrating it in the present. The media are almost unremittingly negative. The decline of the British seaside began later than is often assumed – in the 1970s rather than the 1960s in most places – and has much more complex causes than the rise of the Mediterranean package tour, which was also a slower and later developer than many believe. And now many resorts are working hard at regeneration, so the sun hasn't set on the British seaside just yet. **H**

**Dr John K Walton** is an Ikerbasque research professor in contemporary history at the University of the Basque Country, Bilbao

### DISCOVER MORE

#### BOOKS

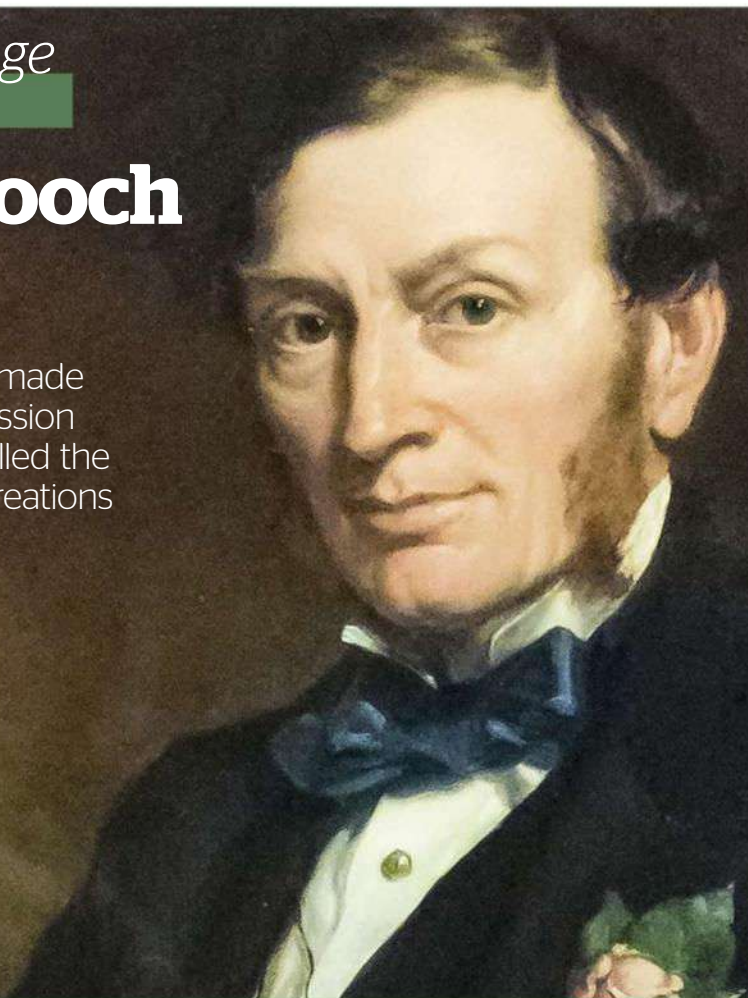
- **Designing the Seaside** by Fred Gray (Reaktion, 2009)
- **Beside the Sea: Britain's Lost Seaside Heritage** by Sarah Freeman (Aurum, 2015)
- **The English Seaside Resort, 1750–1914** by John K Walton (Leicester University Press, 1983)



# Daniel Gooch

1816–89

One of the men who made the engineering profession respectable – and fulfilled the potential of Brunel's creations



Thanks to Gooch, messages could be sent across the Atlantic at the rate of eight words per minute

**E**ngineering was not glamorous when Victoria came to the throne. Some engineers were well-off, and many were admired, but these were still men who had to work for a living; they had to roll up their sleeves and get dirty. Engineering was a trade, not a profession like the law or the church. But the Victorian era made engineering a glamorous profession whose practitioners could seemingly achieve the impossible.

Isambard Kingdom Brunel is probably the best-known Victorian engineer nowadays, but his contemporaries had mixed feelings about him. To many, Brunel was a reckless show-off who squandered investors' money on grand projects which were often commercial failures.

Brunel's memory overshadows that of his friend Daniel Gooch, one of the most successful, and far less showy, engineers of the period. Without Gooch, Brunel's Great Western Railway (GWR) would not have been such a success and Gooch was the only person to make good use of Brunel's final great project.

Gooch came from a middle-class background in Northumberland and a big extended family of engineers. It was his good fortune to gain experience in

locomotive building right at the start of the railway era. By the age of 21, he was designing locomotives for the GWR, and with notably more success than Brunel, who had little previous experience. Gooch would be involved with the GWR for most of his career, overseeing the new locomotive works at Swindon and building engines that were unrivalled for speed, safety and reliability.

Gooch was also a businessman and a people person. For 20 years he was Conservative MP for Cricklade, and when the GWR was financially over-extended, he agreed to become chairman in 1865, a post he held until his death. He brought the firm back to health from the verge of bankruptcy and enabled it to build the Severn Railway Tunnel. This was carried out by Sir John Hawkshaw, another practical-minded northern engineer. It was the longest underwater tunnel in the world in

*It was men like Gooch who made the grand visions of dreamers like Brunel actually work*

its time, and a stupendous achievement.

Gooch had several other business interests, but he earned a baronetcy for his part in building what one author has called the Victorian internet: he used Brunel's last great ship to successfully lay a telegraph cable across the Atlantic.

The SS *Great Eastern* was seen as Brunel's greatest folly. This vast ship – five times the size of anything then afloat – had been financially ruinous and beset with technical problems; it had probably hastened Brunel's death. Gooch used her to carry the 2,300 miles of cable needed for a transatlantic telegraph link. On the first attempt, in 1865, the cable broke. But *Great Eastern* set out again the following year, successfully laid the cable and triumphantly retrieved the lost one. Reliable and almost-instant communication between Britain and the United States was now possible.

In the end, it was men like Daniel Gooch, heads full of (usually Northern or Scottish) common sense, who made the grand visions of dreamers like Brunel actually work. And in the process, the world of 1901 had changed beyond all recognition from that of 1837. **H**

Words: Eugene Byrne



# HISTORY EXPLORER

## The Chartist movement

Charlotte Hodgman visits **Rosedene Cottage** with **Dr Joan Allen** to explore the 19th-century campaign for working-class enfranchisement

Visitors to London on 10 April 1848 would have been taken aback by the sight of more than 20,000 people gathered on Kennington Common. They would have been even more surprised if they'd known that the three horse-drawn cabs wending their way slowly from the massed crowd, in the direction of Westminster, were transporting thousands of pieces of paper that contained the signatures of millions of people demanding a host of democratic rights.

This petition, which followed two others – in 1839 and 1842 – was the product of a national reform movement known as Chartism, a political campaign partly borne out of the Great Reform Act of 1832, which had only extended the right to vote to the middle classes.

“The run-up to the 1832 act had seen a raft of protests and demonstrations by the middle and working classes, who had combined forces to gain the right to vote,” says Dr Joan Allen, senior lecturer in modern British history at Newcastle University. “But when only householders who paid £10 or more a year in rent – as well as small landowners, tenant farmers and shopkeepers – were given the right to vote, the working classes were left disenfranchised.

“Add to that the exactions of the Poor Law Amendment Act (1834), which imposed harsh conditions for claiming relief at a time of acute economic depression, and you have the perfect breeding ground for the growth of working-class radicalism.”

In 1836, Cornish-born cabinetmaker William Lovett founded the London Working Men's Association “to seek by every legal

means to place all classes of society in possession of the equal political and social rights”. And in May 1838, the association published a six-point People's Charter (from which Chartism derived its name), demanding universal manhood suffrage, a secret ballot, payment for MPs, the abolition of property qualifications for MPs, equal electoral districts and annual parliaments. The fight for the working-class vote was on once more.

“But Chartism encompassed more than electoral reform. It envisioned a more equal society based on wider access to education and improved working conditions, one which rewarded hard work and self improvement,” says Allen. And nowhere is this more apparent than at Rosedene in Dodford, a small, red-bricked cottage that once formed part of a Chartist ‘colony’ of around 40 smallholdings.

The settlement at Dodford was one of five created by Feargus O'Connor – a Chartist leader, and MP for Nottingham from 1847 – as part of the Chartist Land Co-Operative Society, an organisation that procured smallholdings for working men in order to meet the land-holding criteria for gaining voting rights, and provided people with the means to be self-sufficient.

Plots of two, three and four acres were allocated by means of a ballot, with anyone owning shares in the land company entitled to enter. Each name drawn received a plot of land equivalent to the number of shares held, and a cottage – with a dresser (see picture overleaf). The holders would still have to pay ground rent, but ownership of the cottage and land entitled them to a vote.

Dodford was the last Chartist settlement to be created by O'Connor, who purchased the 280-acre site in May 1848 for £10,350. Yet, by

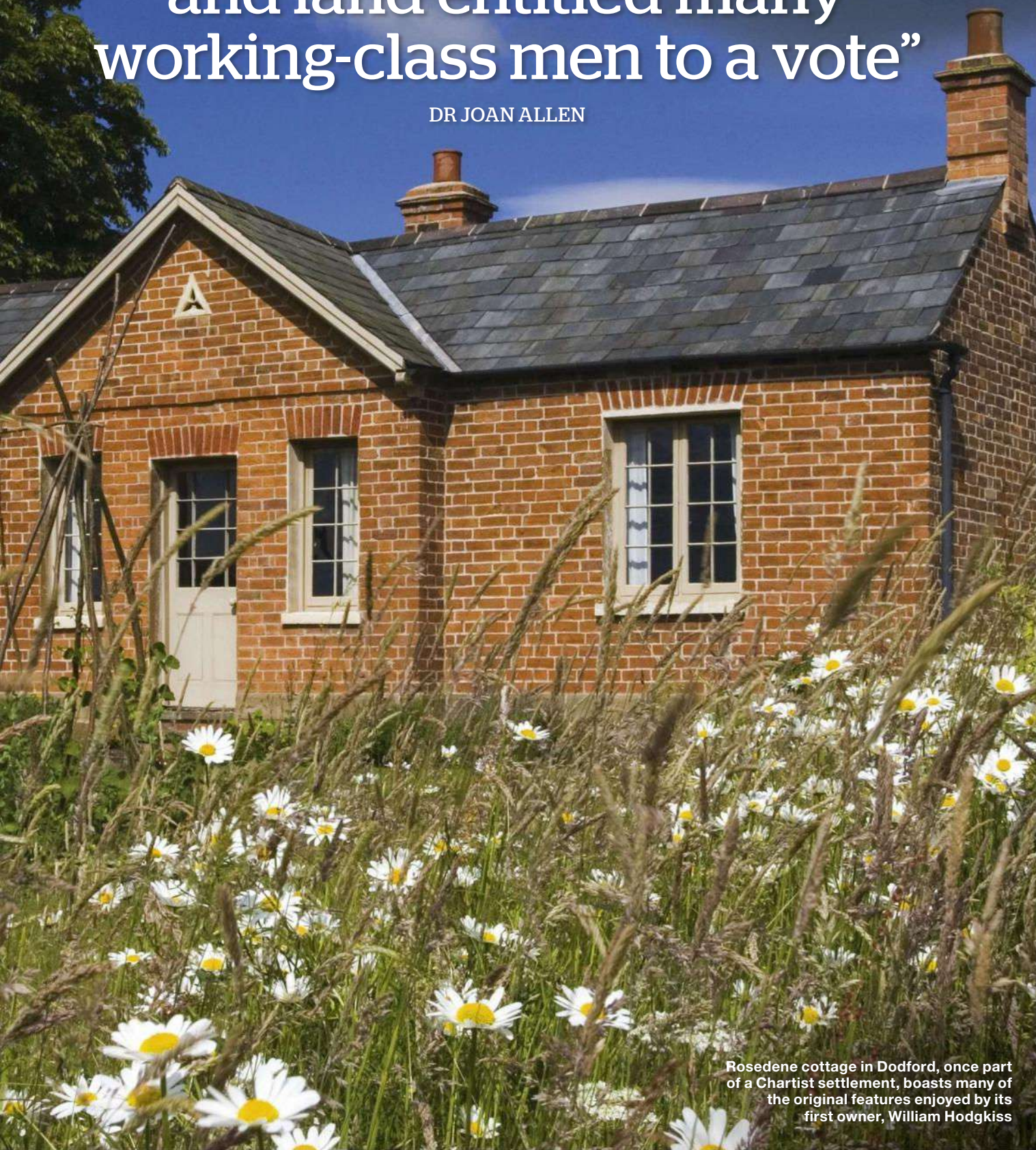


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# “Ownership of a cottage and land entitled many working-class men to a vote”

DR JOAN ALLEN



Rosedene cottage in Dodford, once part of a Chartist settlement, boasts many of the original features enjoyed by its first owner, William Hodgkiss



## VISIT

### Rosedene



Victoria Road, Dodford, near Bromsgrove, Worcestershire B61 9BU

● [nationaltrust.org.uk/rosedene](http://nationaltrust.org.uk/rosedene)

Admission by pre-booked guided tours



**Every Chartist cottage came complete with a dresser, like this replica at Rosedene**

August 1848 the ballot scheme had ended – declared illegal in breach of the Lotteries Acts by the Select Committee which investigated its shortcomings – and O'Connor was forced to ask for a 'premium' or deposit to be paid to obtain possession. In one case, £150 was paid – then a considerable sum of money.

Like other cottages on the estate, Rosedene had its own well and pump, both of which remain, and was built to a simple, three-room design, using local sandstone. Two bedrooms stand at either end of the building – with their original flooring and fireplaces – while the central living room still forms the heart of the house. This room contains a large replica dresser, similar to the one that came with the cottage, as well as a sturdy range on which the family would have cooked. At the front of the house, on the gable, a triangular insert with a trefoil opening gives ventilation to the roof void – a feature typical of Chartist houses.

Today's Rosedene retains its original 1840s structure thanks to extensive restoration work by the National Trust, and visitors get a real sense of how it would have looked when its first owner, William Hodgkiss – an East India Company pensioner from Cork – moved in.

Unfortunately for Hodgkiss and his fellow 'colonists', O'Connor's dream of multiple communities of shared cooperation wasn't a huge success. "For a start, many of the estates' inhabitants came from industrial areas and had little or no idea how to sustain themselves on the land," says Allen. "Sometimes the land itself was the problem as the soil was unsuitable for growing planned crops:

Dodford's clay soil made it almost impossible to farm anything but strawberries."

And, with each estate remortgaged to finance the next, it wasn't long before the land scheme ran into considerable financial difficulties. "O'Connor was a gifted radical activist, not a businessman, and failed to register the scheme properly: by 1851 his land company had been wound up following a parliamentary investigation."

### Spreading the word

O'Connor's settlements were really the grand finale of the Chartist movement and formed part of a wider campaign for political and social equality.

"Print culture was crucial to the Chartist campaign," says Allen, "and the movement owed much of its support to the *Northern Star* – a Chartist newspaper that O'Connor launched in Leeds in November 1837.

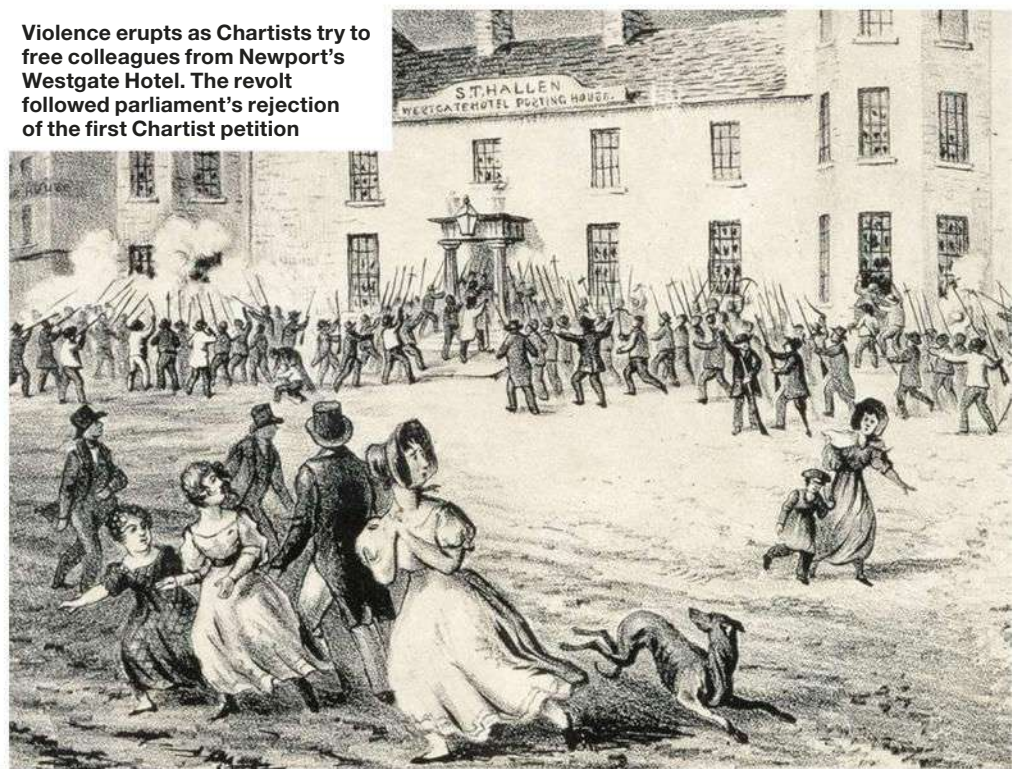
The paper's popularity was phenomenal – in August 1839 it was even outselling *The Times* – and it quickly became the coordinating vehicle for the movement. It was frequently read aloud in pubs and factories, thus widening the circle of readers beyond skilled and literate artisans."

The People's Charter itself was announced to a public meeting of an estimated 150,000 who had gathered on Glasgow Green on

21 May 1838, and tens of thousands of people attended Chartist rallies in Birmingham, Manchester and elsewhere throughout that year. On the whole, the gatherings were peaceful, but some Chartist leaders advocated using physical force if protest by peaceful means failed.

"As the Chartist movement had no single leader or figurehead it was perennially bedeviled by internal conflict and tension," explains Allen. "The leaders constantly argued about the best way to achieve their demands and disagreed strongly on the tactics to be used. Some were prepared to take up arms as a last resort, whereas 'moral force' Chartists, led by Lovett, advocated accepted constitutional means of making their case."

**Violence erupts as Chartists try to free colleagues from Newport's Westgate Hotel. The revolt followed parliament's rejection of the first Chartist petition**



NATIONAL TRUST IMAGES-ROBERT MORRIS



## CHARTISM: FIVE MORE PLACES TO EXPLORE

### THE CHARTIST PETITION SUBMITTED IN 1842 BOASTED OVER 3.3 MILLION NAMES SIGNED ON AROUND SIX MILES OF PAPER

The most famous act of Chartist violence took place in Newport, South Wales in November 1839, a few months after parliament had rejected the movement's first petition of more than 1.2 million signatures. John Frost, a radical former mayor of Newport, led the rising, which resulted in the deaths of at least 22 men and left 50 others seriously injured. Frost and other Chartist leaders were captured and later sentenced to death for high treason, although this was commuted to transportation to Australia.

"The Newport rising stood little chance, for the government had been monitoring Chartist activity carefully, using surveillance to gather intelligence on Chartist plans," says Allen. "It's generally accepted that if the Newport rising had not been put down it would have triggered further rebellions. The government had to quash the uprising to prevent the movement gathering even more strength. The trial of the rebellion's leaders, and the subsequent death sentence, was intended to deter others in the Chartist heartlands of northern England from adopting riotous tactics."

#### Final days

The Chartist petition presented to parliament in 1842 boasted more than 3.3 million names, signed on around six miles of paper. Writing in the *Northern Star* on 7 May 1842, Feargus O'Connor stated: "Our petition smashed the door frames of the narrow house – it broke them in pieces..."

However, the Chartist movement began to run out of steam soon after its third and final national petition, which gained the support of just 15 MPs and probably contained numerous bogus signatures. It was rejected by parliament in 1848.

"The Chartists had tried just about every avenue open to them to achieve parliamentary reform for the working classes – from rebellion to petitioning," says Allen. "By 1850, the *Northern Star*, which had consistently rallied support for the movement, had lost its mass readership and eventually folded in 1852. The Chartist Land Co-Operative Society had also ended by this point, and O'Connor himself died in August 1855.

"What's more, economic conditions for some sections of the working classes were beginning to improve, and this undercut some of the impetus for reform. There just wasn't the same degree of hardship there had been in the late 1830s when the Chartist movement started to gain real momentum."

Although Chartist associations survived in small cells across Britain until around the late 1850s, none of the six points from the People's Charter were adopted during the movement's lifetime. But successive generations of radicals were inspired by its legacy to press the case for democracy, notably in 1867 when a further extension of the franchise was secured.

In fact, five of the six Chartist points were eventually adopted – only annual parliaments, which were considered unworkable, failed to make it into the statute books. **H**

Words: Charlotte Hodgman. Historical advisor: Dr Joan Allen, senior lecturer in modern British history at Newcastle University

#### 1 Newport, South Wales

Where Chartists turned to violence Newport was the site of a major Chartist uprising in 1839 which saw at least 22 men die. Sadly, artist Kenneth Budd's 1978 mural marking the rebellion was destroyed by the council in 2013, but it is possible to see the former Westgate Hotel at the bottom of Stow Hill, the site where the rebellion took place. Newport Museum has an extensive Chartist collection including images, weapons and newspapers from the time. [newport.gov.uk](http://newport.gov.uk)

#### 2 Kensal Green Cemetery, London

Where Feargus O'Connor was buried Irish-born O'Connor was the Chartist movement's only MP, and founder of its biggest newspaper, the *Northern Star*. Dubbed the 'lion of freedom', he died in 1855 after suffering a mental breakdown and was buried in Kensal Green Cemetery. A crowd of 40,000 witnessed his funeral procession. You'll find his monument at grave no.12687, square 27, row 3. [kensalgreen.co.uk](http://kensalgreen.co.uk)

#### 3 Glasgow Green, Glasgow

Where the People's Charter was read A crowd of around 150,000 gathered here in the pouring rain on 21 May 1838 to hear the People's Charter for the first time. The park, which is the city's oldest, is open at all times and visitors can enjoy historical walking tours of the green. [glasgow.gov.uk](http://glasgow.gov.uk)

#### 4 Lancaster Castle, Lancaster

Where leading Chartists went on trial The rejection of the second Chartist petition in 1842 triggered various rebellions and in 1843 some 59 Chartists (including O'Connor) were put on trial at Lancaster Castle's Assize Court where they were acquitted. You can visit the court (which still operates as a Crown Court) as part of a tour of the medieval castle. [lancastercastle.com](http://lancastercastle.com)

#### 5 Gwennap Pit, Cornwall

Where rallies engaged local people Chartism in Cornwall took a while to catch on, so in 1839 Chartist missionaries organised mass rallies to spread the word about the movement. These took place at Gwennap Pit, an open-air amphitheatre near Redruth that is still open to the public. [gwennappit.co.uk](http://gwennappit.co.uk)



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Tristram Hunt on... **Traditional values and politics today**

## “The ideology and ambition of the Victorians seems back in vogue”

**Y**ou cannot escape the Victorians if you work in the House of Commons – which I do as a Labour MP. The Palace of Westminster is a triumph of mid-19th-century self-regard, rebuilt from its medieval origins over a 30 year period from the 1840s. The building’s paintings, statues and busts were commissioned to celebrate “the long and uninterruptedly increasing prosperity of England as the most beautiful phenomenon in the history of mankind,” as historian Henry Hallam had described Britain’s stable polity a few years earlier. From Charles Barry’s architecture to Augustus Pugin’s interiors to Herbert Minton’s tiles, all the design bravado and engineering excellence of the Victorians is on display. And it seems to affect the politics.

For even as we move ever further away from our 19th-century predecessors, the ideology and ambition of the Victorians seems back in vogue. It begins at the top. Prime Minister Theresa May has declared the great Victorian statesman Joseph Chamberlain (1836–1914) her political idol.

As a liberal Mayor of Birmingham, he was an interventionist unafraid to take on the small state and free trade mantras. Under his stewardship, the city that was once dubbed the ‘Venice of the Midlands’ became a model of municipal socialism: an active local government using public funds to elevate the life of its citizenry. As such, it pointed to a different understanding of the role of the state – more interventionist, progressive, and redistributive. With her plans for an apprenticeship levy, higher minimum wage, and workers on company boards, it looks like this is the direction in which Prime Minister May’s government is heading.

Chamberlain began his political career as a Liberal, but he later became a Tory. One of the central issues that drove him to change his stance was the country’s imperial obligations and Britain’s role in the world – a motif that resonates today as we debate the nature of Brexit Britain.

In the late 19th century Chamberlain was colonial secretary and, with the threat of German and Russian competition growing, he urged a more unified pact between Canada, South Africa, Australia and New

.....  
**Tristram Hunt** has been Labour MP for Stoke-on-Trent Central since 2010 and is a historian. His books include *Ten Cities that Made an Empire* (Penguin, 2015)

Zealand – the so-called ‘Anglo-Saxon’ colonies. Like today’s International Trade Secretary, Liam Fox, Chamberlain wanted a customs union, with “a treaty of preference and reciprocity” with Britain’s global possessions. Chamberlain thought it could be, “the strongest bond of union between the British race throughout the world”. But the stain of racial superiority was not far away: “I believe in this Anglo-Saxon race,” he announced, “so proud, so tenacious, self-confident and determined, this race which neither climate nor change can degenerate, which will infallibly be the predominant force of future history.”

On my side of the House of Commons, the spirit of the Victorians has also re-emerged under the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn. His political hero is not ‘Radical Joe’ Chamberlain, but the first leader of the Labour Party, Keir Hardie (1856–1915): “A great man who did more to found our party than any other and who still inspires us to this day,” as Corbyn puts it.

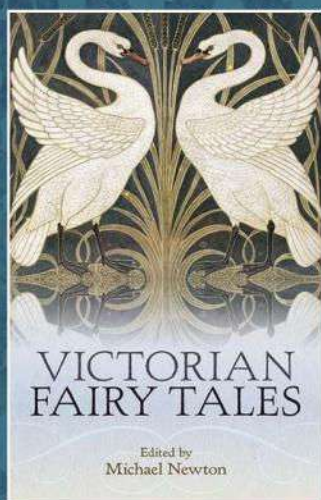
Like Hardie, Jeremy Corbyn has something of the prophet about him, as well as a strong sense of the ethical foundations of socialism. And when it comes to house building, taxation policy, education policy and, above all, internationalism, then Hardie seems to offer Corbyn a practical programme of action. “Our mission now is the same,” explains the equally bearded Corbyn, “as that which Hardie laid out, when he said that the movement would not rest until ‘the sunshine of Socialism and human freedom break forth upon our land’.”

It is not just in Westminster that the spirit of the 19th century has re-asserted itself. The new landscape of urban devolution has seen the return of something like Victorian civic pride. With directly elected mayors set for London, Birmingham, Liverpool and Manchester, then something of that great spirit of civic patriotism that built our urban civilisation looks set for a renaissance. I look forward to a new generation of mayors taking on the power of London and spreading wealth and creativity more evenly across the UK.

So, I am all for a revival of the Victorian spirit. But let’s make sure we also commemorate and interpret the incredible intellectual, scientific, and artistic vitality of that period as well. Victorian Britain was always keen to emphasise its rich cultural connections to the European continent – a political point that Brexit Britain should be careful not to lose sight of. **H**





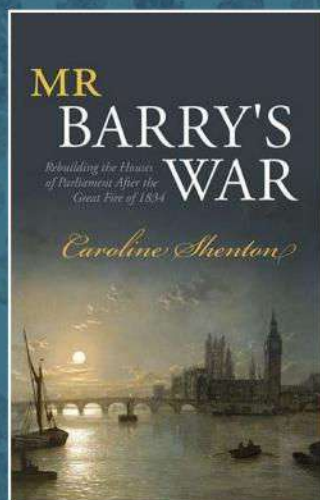


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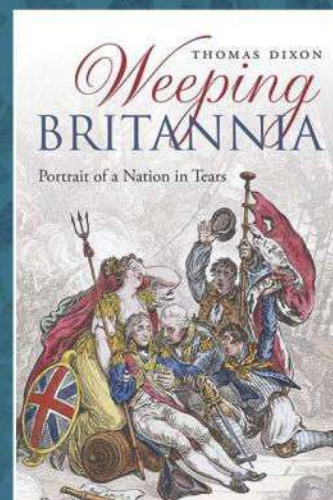
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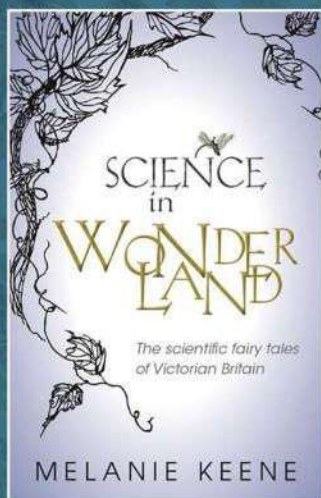
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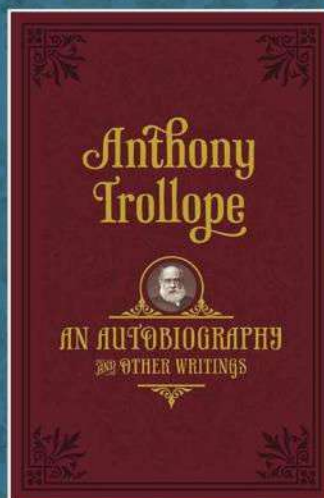
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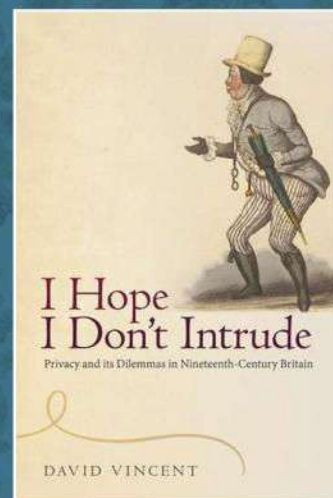
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